THE MEASURE of A MAN

A TALE OF THE BIG WOODS

By NORMAN DUNCAN

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THE MEASURE of A MAN

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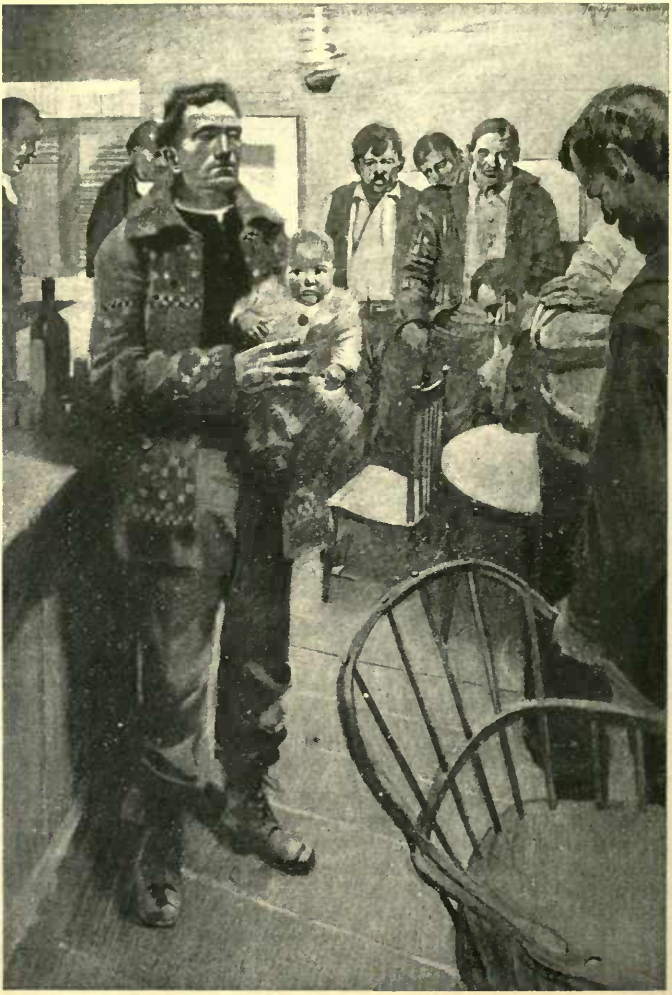

"Make of this child, a Man"

THE MEASURE of A MAN

A Tale of The Big Woods

By
NORMAN DUNCAN
Author of "Doctor Luke of the Labrador," etc.

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To The

L. L. *of* E. O.

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To the Reader

IT is known that the way back is hard trudging and a long path. No man, it may be, having run the length of his will for running, has got back alone to clean fields of rest and endeavour. Love is much on these harsh trails, they say; but love is no sure guide and helper. It is maintained that such as have been helped return neither with reasonable tales of their black wanderings nor reasonable descriptions of the way. They tell, rather, in a manner incoherent and obscure, of a mystical Hand that helped: but concerning this Hand are various faiths among them; and among those who listen, bewildered, being themselves apart from the experience, are many surmises, of course. Here in this book is neither faith nor surmise: but only a tale told—without any hint of guidance other than the established truths of the narrative may of their own notion convey.

N. D.

Indian Pond, Maine,
July 2, 1911.

WHEN some years ago the author published "Doctor Luke of The Labrador," it was mistakenly inferred by many thousands of readers that the tale was a literal description of the life of Dr. Wilfred T. Grenfell; and a great confusion resulted. It is hoped that the reader will not confuse the hero of "The Measure of a Man" with the Rev. Francis E. Higgins of Minnesota. Mr. Higgins is a missionary of the Presbyterian Board of Home Missions—a very real man, doing a real and admirable work for his Church in the woods of the Northwest. Although some of the incidents of this story are taken directly from his experience, and many others are founded upon certain passages in his missionary career, it must not be inferred that the man himself bears any invidious resemblance to John Fairmeadow. It must be added that the story is not a tale of the lumbering industry but of a singular man at work among lumber-jacks.

N. D.

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The Measure of a Man

I

THE STRANGER AT SWAMP'S END

THAT a dog fight—a growling squabble in the early summer dust and sunshine—should upset the lumber-woods settlement of Swamp's End and divert her most eminent citizens from their accustomed employments was in itself almost sign manifest of the awakening interest of Providence in that benighted but fervently joyous community. When it is explained that the dog fight occurred simultaneously with the appearance of John Fairmeadow in the clearing—and after proper reflection upon the remarkable coincidence—it will be obvious that nothing more need be said. The absence of an instant and grateful perception of the impending beneficence, however, on the part of Swamp's End, is to be condoned: Providence had never before interfered at Swamp's End. Nor had Swamp's End now deputed any person or persons whomsoever to invite the intervention of Providence, or of any other supercilious Easterner, including John Fairmeadow, in her domestic concerns. The domestic concerns of Swamp's End, of course, were cherished at Swamp's End as inviolate; and Swamp's End was not at all conscious of any need of providential assistance in the management of them.

"You see," Gingerbread Jenkins has since been heard to apologize, "the boys wasn't quite *used* t' Providence."

There is a generous concurrence.

"Somehow, too," Plain Tom Hitch drawls in explanation, "Providence didn't seem t' be very well acquainted with the boys."

In those days, Swamp's End was on scantest —and, I fear, most suspicious—terms of acquaintance with Providence. Swamp's End regarded Providence in the light of a sinister stranger, of vastly mysterious and engaging personality, perhaps—of some noteworthy fame, to be sure—and certainly of accomplishments not to be despised by any cautious individual—with whom, however, it would be quite as well to have nothing to do, in any intimate way, until the sensational rumours, affecting the visitor's reputation as a gentleman of those qualities held in highest admiration at Swamp's End, should have been rigidly investigated. Moreover, the dog fight was of such an extraordinary aspect—a contention so singular— and so indecent in issue—that Swamp's End was far too happily engrossed in the progress of the affair to discover the hand of Providence in its inception. Swamp's End was inclined towards excitement of that mild description, and was used to indulging, of course, in entertainment at once much more reprehensible and engaging; and Swamp's End is not fairly to be condemned for preferring its accustomed diversions above fasting and prayer, of which, believe me, it knew nothing at all, as a community, and had never been told.

According to old John Rowl, the scaler from Kettle Camp of the Cant-hook cutting, who had sardonically cherished the rise of Swamp's End from its obscure beginnings with one shanty saloon to the flourishing prosperity of its thirty-two—according to old John Rowl, Gingerbread Jenkins, the Bottle River swamper, subsequently remarked in Pale Peter's bar:

> "Gawd moo-ooves in a mystee-ee-eerious way,
> His wonders to pre-form,"

and the sentiment was promptly adopted as a succinct expression of the general feeling in respect to the occurrences of the day and the amazing situation which the advent of John Fairmeadow had precipitated upon the startled community.

The agitated bar agreed, it is reported, and with the only recorded unanimity.

"That's *reason*," Charlie the Infidel declared.

Gingerbread Jenkins, it seemed, had dropped a pearl of wisdom from the casket of his memory; and Gingerbread Jenkins, elated by the impression his philosophical quotation had achieved upon the popular bewilderment, would have cast other pearls of the sort, with a free, glad hand, in expectation of increasing the enlightenment, had not Plain Tom Hitch been distracted from his liquor by an illuminating idea.

"There's a lot o' common sense," said Plain Tom Hitch, "in them old school-books."

"You take a man's mother," Billy the Beast began, "an' her teachin'——"

"Gimme a match."

Gingerbread Jenkins was about to give tongue, once more, when Charlie the Infidel, Pale Peter's bartender, interrupted with a suggestion which in the gravest parliamentary fashion was at Swamp's End always and sacredly in order.

"What'll ye have, boys?" said he; "the drinks is on the house."

Plain Tom Hitch stroked his beard, in a muse of anxious deliberation, and gently whispered:

"A li'l' licker, Charlie—fer *me*."

The echo ran down the frowzy line:

"A li'l' licker—fer mine."

"The same, Charlie, fer me."

"Mine's—a li'l' licker."

They had the liquor, man and boy, in hearty drams, and in this convivial way the arrival of

Providence at Swamp's End was accepted and celebrated according to the customs. Thereafter Almighty God was a familiar inhabitant of Swamp's End—and of the logging camps of all His great surrounding woods—and might fairly have been enumerated in the census. It is to be noted, however, that John Fairmeadow introduced and vouched for Him, as shall presently be told. To the amazement of Swamp's End the Stranger behaved Himself with perfect propriety even according to the somewhat difficult standards of the place. Swamp's End was proud of Him. He turned out to be genial, kindly, wise, fair-minded, chivalrous,—quite a manly Chap: a worthy, acceptable, winning Fellow, truly! Swamp's End occasionally disagreed with Him, of course. That was inevitable. Both Swamp's End and the Stranger had positive convictions. But Swamp's End was very fond of Him, nevertheless.

II

AN ENGAGEMENT WITH GOD

SWAMP'S END gave no impression of having taken permanent possession of the clearing in which it was situated. In suggestion it was rather a lumber-woods settlement which had not quite made up its mind about settling, being for the moment too much preoccupied with a bottle. It seemed, on second thought, merely to have squatted in a mud-puddle in the midst of the woods to rest its inebriated legs. The thirty-two shanty saloons of the high-street had certainly locked arms and gone into a drunken stupor in the cozy shelter of the pines. They leaned one against the other in singular and helpless dependence, necks limp, bodies lax and awry, hats cocked or gone; and they were quite unashamed of their scandalous condition, because, perhaps, they were in the fashion, and conducted themselves precisely as everybody expected them to behave, and after the approved model of those woods.

A push, of course—a vigorous push by John Fairmeadow—might have sent them sprawling; and Fairmeadow was even then on the trail from Elegant Corners to Big Rapids, momentarily approaching. But Pale Peter's place, the ramshackle hotel on the corner, might not have yielded so easily. It achieved an impression of sleepy sobriety, and it was at least steady on its legs. What other habitations there were—a lesser crew, compounded of logs, turf, pine-board and tar-paper, with a helpful addition of packing boxes—squatted near in various attitudes of inebriety, now lying, all beggared and listless, in a glowing summer haze and pause. No matter, however: the whole—the company of makeshift dwellings no less than the folk who went in and out—was peregrinating west by north on the heels of the slow-moving lumber camps; and what broken bodies and souls might be left with the refuse of the sojourn in the balsamic clearing concerned nobody.

The aspiring homesteaders would presently raise a city in that place and give it a new name.

It was an eventful day at Swamp's End—the still and mellow Sunday of John Fairmeadow's first professional appearance. The dog fight served importantly to gather the crowd, of course, and to enlist the hurrying Fairmeadow's attention; but the dog fight was not all. In the early hours of the morning—a warm, flushed dawn—a tote-wagon, drawn by two stolid black beasts, and gravely driven by Plain Tom Hitch, had arrived from the Bottle River camps, bearing the mortal remains of Gray Billy Batch, who had departed this life, much to the annoyance of the foreman of the drive, and doubtless to his own surprise and alarm, in the Rattle Water rapids below Big Bend of Bottle River. He had been a scurrilous dog when the breath of life was in him, a sour and unloved wastrel of his days, morose, unkempt, ill-mouthed, in a rage with all the world, save one young heart, and least kind of all to the body they presently fished from the swirl and foam of the eddy below Rattle Water, and to the misled soul that had sped to the solution of its own mystery.

It is to be regretted that a division of the Bottle River drive, employed in the neighbourhood, and thus fortunately vantaged to observe the departure of Gray Billy Batch, experienced a flush of rejoicing at the moment of inevitable farewell. When, however, the dripping corpse lay on the bank, the feet still in the wash of the water, the gray face in the shadow of the birches, the Bottle River drive stood voiceless and quiet in this Presence; and, perhaps, old terrors awoke, and the strings of memory were touched, and the depths gave tongue. At any rate, in the more charitable mood of that soft afternoon, it was informally resolved, and without Gray Billy Batch's consent or interest in the extraordinary proceeding, that the only surviving relative of the deceased should forthwith be apprized of the lamentable fatality and assured of the deep sense of personal loss under which his associates of the Bottle River camps drooped disconsolate.

The surviving relative was Patience, Gray Billy Batch's daughter, a sweet, brown mite, with a child's curious outlook upon the world of Swamp's End, though now fast and shyly approaching her eighteenth year. It was Saturday evening, at sunset, with the breeze fallen away to an odorous breath of air, when Gingerbread Jenkins, sufficiently fortified, but still agitated and heavy with his errand, came upon her, waiting in the dooryard of the shack, a listless log dwelling which Gray Billy Batch had knocked together at the edge of the clearing in which Swamp's End squatted. "Pattie, my dear," said he, with a soothing hand on the girl's shoulder, "your pop won't be comin' home t'-night."

The girl looked up in quick alarm.

"You see," Gingerbread added, "he's—delayed."

"That's funny," Pattie replied; "he most always comes home from the Bottle River on Saturday night. I—I—been waitin'."

Gingerbread Jenkins sighed. "Not t'-night," said he. "You see, he's—hindered."

"I—I—I been *waitin'*," pretty little Pattie Batch complained.

"He's—hindered," Gingerbread blankly repeated.

"Is he comin' t'-morrow?"

"Well, yes," Gingerbread admitted, more heartily; "you see, he'll be *fetched*."

"What say?"

"He'll come home, all right," Gingerbread repeated, "fetched—in a sort of a way."

"Is he drunk?"

"Drunk? Oh, my, no!" Gingerbread Jenkins protested; "*he* ain't drunk, my dear."

"Is he near drunk?"

Gingerbread Jenkins, hard put to it for words wherewithal in the presence of a lady, ejaculated: "Good gracious, no!"

"That's funny," said Pattie Batch. "Where's he gettin' drunk?"

"He ain't gettin' drunk nowheres."

"Not *gettin'* drunk?" Pattie Batch exclaimed. "That's funny."

"You see," Gingerbread gently exclaimed "your pop won't be drunk no more."

"Is he—is he—*dead?*"

Gingerbread Jenkins was flustered by this abrupt question. It bewildered him, too, to learn, all in a flash of revelation, that Gray Billy Batch had been loved and would be mourned. "Oh, well, now!" he replied, hurriedly, "I wouldn't go so far as t' say *that*. I'd say," he explained, lamely, "that he was—that he was—engaged."

"Who's his business *with?*"

Gingerbread Jenkins' bleared eyes were all at once flushed. "Your pop's business, my dear," he answered, softly, driven to the disclosure at last, "is with God."

"Pop's dead!" the girl gasped.

Gingerbread's eyes overflowed. Off came his old cloth cap. He nodded. "Pop's dead," said he.

"Pop's dead!" Pattie repeated, her gray eyes round with wonder, which no pain had yet disturbed. "Pop's dead!" She brooded upon this new thing; and presently, with a start, her hands fallen upon her agitated bosom, she turned to the shack, wherein, through the open door, she seemed to discover her loneliness, but not yet to be troubled by it. She looked, then, without concern, to the high, darkening sky, and to the flaring sunset clouds, above the black pines, whence her wistful glance fell to the besotted settlement, huddled in the gathering shadows beyond the confines of her familiar place. "He's dead!" she whispered. "Pop's dead!"

"Hush!" Gingerbread Jenkins besought her; "don't cry."

She was not crying; she looked up to him with the light of interest lively in her gray eyes, for which, perhaps, the monotony of her days is to be blamed. "When's the fun'l?" she inquired.

"Eh?" Gingerbread Jenkins ejaculated. "When's what?"

"When's the fun'l?"

"Whose?"

"Why, pop's!"

"Oh!" said Gingerbread, enlightened but not advised, and now taken aback. "I *see*."

"Goin' t' be a fun'l, isn't there?"

"Eh?"

"Isn't there goin' t' *be* no fun'l?"

"Well, you see," said Gingerbread, "he'll be *buried*."

"That all?"

"Well," Gingerbread admitted, "I haven't heard nobody say nothin' about no funeerial."

"No fun'l?" Pattie wailed. "No fun'l a-*tall?*"

Gingerbread deliberated. The matter of obsequies had not been included in his instructions. But something had to be done to correct this flow of tears. "Didn't hear nobody say nothin' *much* about no funeerial," he hedged.

Pattie whimpered.

"But I'm told," Gingerbread ventured, "that the boys had a little game like that in mind."

Pattie began to cry outright.

"You see," Gingerbread hastily proceeded, "there was a deal o' talk about consultin' the only survivin' re-lation about the percession."

The girl looked up with a wet and glistening smile.

"An' there'll *be* a funeerial," Gingerbread Jenkins declared, flushed with tender determination, "or there'll be hell t' pay on Bottle River!"

And when the uplifted Gingerbread Jenkins went away resolved upon his own concerns—to agitate a spectacle, in fact, worthy of easing poor Pattie Batch's grief—Pattie Batch did not go into the cabin. She did not so much as look in that ghostly direction; she turned her back, with a frightened little shudder, and strayed off to the twilit woods. She did not go far, at all: she dared not; it was darkening fast, and she was afraid as she had never before known fear. But she found at the edge of the clearing a companionable patch of wild-flowers, come to their shy and fragrant blooming in the sunny weather of that day; and she plucked them, while the soft light lasted, and adorned herself, according to her nature—God's jewels, flung broadcast in love upon the earth, inspiring no avarice, now peeping from her cloud of dark hair, and clasped around her slender wrists, and wreathing her shoulders, an acceptable garland. It was a pleasant thing to do; she was distracted by the delights of her fairy occupation and by her thronging fancies, as she had always been, on the edge of the woods at twilight. All the while she sang very softly some sad expression of her mood, in the way she had; and no brooding cadence of the wild-throated woods, no amorous serenade of the dusk, no nesting twitter, was sweeter, none more spontaneously swelling, than her clear, melancholy notes.

It was night: she must go back to her known place.

"I got t' be a man," thought she.

It was what Gray Billy Batch used to tell her —scurrilous Billy Batch who loved nothing in the world beside her. "You got t' be a little man," he used to say; and Pattie had altogether mastered the teaching.

"I got t' be a little man," she determined, again, "like pop used t' say."

So she gave her fears to the shadows of night, in a long sigh, and set out, with a resolute shake of her little head, which showered the flowers from her hair, and with a step that was not afraid. But she was not to be alone in the cabin, after all, it seemed; she came, there, into the disquieting company of her future.

"I s'pose I got t' do something," she mused, much troubled.

It was not clear what that should be.

"Can't stay here all alone no more," she determined. "I just simply *can't.*"

By and by she busied herself upon a black gown, which had been her mother's, long ago; and she ripped, and she basted, and she tucked, and she sewed, singing a little, like a child who cannot comprehend a swiftly encompassing sorrow, and sighing a little, too, and now and again overcome by a vision of her desolate state, whereupon she cried bitterly. It was dawn—flushing mild and rosy over all the redolent, dewy, lively world—before her nimble little fingers rested. And she sighed, then, and having recited her prayers lay down to sleep, in poignant grief, and sobbed herself far away from all her trouble. Poor little Pattie Batch—lying, now, forsaken, in Gray Billy Batch's cabin at the edge of the big, black woods! Unknowing little soul, sweet and trustful—cast now by Death into the vast confusion of life! But Pattie Batch was going to be a li'l' man. Yes, sir, by ginger! Pattie Batch was going to be a li'l' man in every fortune.

III

THE MAN FROM BOTTLE RIVER

IN consequence of all this, the tote-wagon, bearing the mortal remains of Gray Billy Batch, covered from the blithesome new day with a gray blanket, had gravely emerged from the forest in the early hours of the morning, the reins in the knowing hands of Plain Tom Hitch. It was presently drawn up at the Red Elephant, Pale Peter's place, and there expeditiously, but still gravely, abandoned. No unseemly wrangle—not so much as an officious whisper—disturbed the propriety of the arrival and the sunlit quiet of the time. Whatever uncertainty—whatever difference of opinion—may have existed in respect to the ceremonial progress of the extraordinary affair in hand, there was no doubt about what was immediately desirable and proper in the circumstances. The movement of Plain Tom Hitch and Gingerbread Jenkins, and of the prospective mourners, who had sat with the corpse or straggled behind all the way from Bottle River, was silent, simultaneous and in the same direction. They tiptoed into Pale Peter's bar; the swing shutters closed behind them, with a subdued and melancholy creaking, and the high-street of Swamp's End was once more deserted, except for the tote-wagon and its indifferent occupant.

"What'll it be?" Plain Tom Hitch and Gingerbread Jenkins whispered simultaneously.

"A li'l' licker."

The sigh ran down the solemn line:

"A li'l' licker."

"The same."

"A li'l' *gin*—fer me."

Gray Billy Batch, under the gray blanket outside, was left to his own devices; but he was not chagrined, you may be sure, by this exclusion from the amenities of Swamp's End. Nor was his presence beyond the threshold of Pale Peter's bar forgotten. Plain Tom Hitch halted his first glass midway—and nothing but the gravest concern could have moved Tom Hitch to such amazing restraint—Plain Tom Hitch halted his first aromatic glass midway to inquire concerning the disposition and entertainment of "the only survivin' re-lation" of the gray blanket; but having been assured by Gingerbread Jenkins, who had assumed charge of the melancholy affair, that in the event of her failure to appear unaided she would be sought by a deputation and escorted with every courtesy to the tail of the tote-wagon, he paused no longer, but swallowed his liquor with funereal satisfaction.

"Jus' as you say, Gingerbread," he assented, dubiously. "It's your funerlal. You got it up."

"Eh?" Gingerbread inquired, sensing doubt. "I what?"

"You got it up," Tom Hitch replied; "but I wisht I knowed," he added solemnly, "where you was goin' t' put your cant-hooks on them Scriptures."

"What Scriptures?"

"Holy Scriptures," said Plain Tom Hitch.

Gingerbread Jenkins created a diversion by inquiring, in a general way, "What'll you have, boys?"

The response was unanimous:

"A li'l' o' the same, Charlie."

"I don't want t' make no trouble, nor I don't want t' do no buttin' in," Tom Hitch went on, at the conclusion of this grave ceremony; "but I'm told that they're usually *used*."

"What's used?"

"Holy Scriptures," said Plain Tom Hitch.

"You jus' leave all that t' me, Tom Hitch," Gingerbread Jenkins replied, with a display of resentment to conceal a second shock of uneasiness. "If we got t' have the Holy Scriptures for this here funeerial, we'll *have* 'em, an' that's all there is *to* it."

"Jus' as you say, Gingerbread," Tom Hitch assented, with a doubtful wag; "but don't you go an' forget that you got this thing up yourself."

"I ain't hedgin' on it, Tom," Gingerbread protested. "I *did* get it up."

"Got a parson?"

"Well, no, Tom," Gingerbread admitted; "not yet. I ain't picked no parson yet."

"Got a hearse?"

"Not yet," said Gingerbread Jenkins; "but I'm allowin' t' *have* a hearse."

"Got a coffin?"

Gingerbread shook his head.

"Got a grave?"

"I ain't a-*ten*-ded t' all them things," Gingerbread Jenkins exploded, goaded to impatience. "I ain't got my grave *dug*. Gimme time, can't you? I jus' stopped in here for a li'l' licker."

"Jus' as you say, Gingerbread," said Tom Hitch, placidly. "You got it up; it's your funerlal."

There was a vast uncertainty in respect to everything connected with the large-looming event, not only in the flustered mind of poor Gingerbread Jenkins, who was presently appalled by the magnitude his simple project had begun to assume, but in the expectation of the men whom the Cant-hook and Bottle River tote-roads poured into the clearing, and whom the drowsy street of Swamp's End, immediately, and without quite waking up, delivered to the thirty-two saloons. Word had gone abroad in the woods—word of an occasion—of some mysterious demand for a celebration. The men of the Cant-hook and Bottle River—and a smattering of lusty fellows of the Yellow Tail—had drawn their wages and come precipitately to town. There was the vaguest information abroad, however, concerning the occasion; and when, in the thirty-two saloons, it was made known that honour was to be done the gray blanket in the Bottle River tote-wagon, in ease of Pattie Batch's grief, the project was riotously approved and so thoroughly initiated that even the thirty-two proprietors found nothing to complain of. The clink of glasses and the silvery rattle of coin answered well enough for the requiem bell—well enough, at any rate, to content Gray Billy Batch, lying quietly under the gray blanket in the tote-wagon.

But—

"Who got it up?"

"When's he goin' t' pull it off?"

"How's he goin' t' pull it off?"

How was it to be pulled off? That, indeed, was the problem, with which Swamp's End, in view of its limitations, must instantly grapple, the issue of that gigantic struggle being in gravest doubt. Swamp's End, you see, had never had a parson, had never known a parson, and wouldn't have recognized one, you may be sure, had the clouds opened and providentially dropped a parson excellently competent in respect to public occasions of this sort. Swamp's End was completely benighted: Swamp's End had hitherto had no "call" for the ministrations of a parson. Nor had Swamp's End a coffin to mitigate its indecency, nor a shroud, nor a hearse: the obsequies which it had hitherto fallen to the lot of Swamp's End to celebrate had been for the most part performed in the woods, without ostentation, green boughs for coffin, the darkness of the grave shroud enough, the wind in the pines a choir unequalled, the solemnity of the great woods a sufficient sermon. Swamp's End, indeed, had no graveyard: nothing but an avoided slope, near by a shuttered house on the edge of town, where three nameless women were buried, these sunken mounds, with one small cherished grave, asserting jealous ownership of the green and flowery spot.

"*And* no grave dug!" Tom Hitch marvelled at Pale Peter's bar.

"Not *yet*," said Gingerbread Jenkins. "I ain't had no time t' *dig* no grave."

"Have you chose a cem-a-tary?"

"You le' me alone, can't you?" Gingerbread Jenkins complained. "I'll get my cem-a-tary, all right!"

"Jus' as you say, Gingerbread."

Gingerbread growled.

"You started this here little thing," Tom Hitch went on, as he crooked his finger for Charlie the Infidel; "but I want to warn you that there's a hundred men an' eighteen hundred dollars a-comin' t' this here funerlal, an' there didn't ought t' be no hitch t' disappoint the boys."

With the timely assistance of Charlie the Infidel, they sought new light upon the situation, but found, unhappily, only a deeper bewilderment. And as for John Fairmeadow, while the cloud of concern thickened about Gingerbread Jenkins' head, why—John Fairmeadow, on the trail from Elegant Corners, was drawing nearer the clearing of Swamp's End, and would presently emerge from the woods.

IV

A PASTORAL CALL

PATTIE BATCH came to the funeral unattended. In fact, she was early. A childlike little heart, she was, indeed—a tender little flower o' the woods, forever blithesome, in the sun and breezes of the world, until Rattle Water had intervened—and she was now all in a confusion of bitterest grief and dread and fluttering expectation. Except for the tote-wagon and the stolid horses, the street was empty; there was nobody to observe her shy arrival—nobody to be moved by the mourning garment she had accomplished from her dead mother's threadbare black gown and now wore with a modestly appealing little strut. It was a grotesque fashion, no doubt: she resembled, perhaps, nothing so nearly as a child masquerading in grown-up array. But she was all innocent of the modes; the limp black skirt trailed the ground for the first time in her experience, and she was conscious of having emerged into the world, upon her own resources, wherein she must bear herself with courage and resolution, playing the part of a little man in every fortune.

"I *got* t' be a little man!"

Pattie Batch was instantly aware, of course, of the significance of the tote-wagon and the gray blanket.

"Hello, pop!" she whispered.

Gray Billy Batch was indifferent to the greeting.

"Hello, pop!"

Pattie wept, in an overwhelming agony of grief, as she laid a cluster of wild-flowers on the blanket; and she wept, too, as she straightened the disordered folds to ease the rest of the form beneath, as she had done many a time, in other circumstances, when Billy Batch had come home from town.

"Hello, pop!"

No answer.

"Pop! Oh, pop!"

Pattie wept again; and snuffling still—and with a sob and a catch of the breath—she rearranged the flowers, having conceived a more lovely effect, and once more smoothed the blanket, for which she had no thanks, at all: whereupon she moved away. There was a great stir and talk in the barrooms near by. It indicated a long waiting. She dried her eyes with a sleeve of the black gown, and sighed a great deal, and blew her little red nose, and choked back her sobs; and, having long ago learned the part a woman must play at such convivial times, she sat down on the edge of the plank sidewalk in front of Pale Peter's place, her little feet swinging, and began patiently to await the convenience of the men within.

"I got t' be a little *man*, by ginger!" thought she.

She would if she could.

When big, bellicose John Fairmeadow, in a lather of exertion, came striding down the peaceful street, bound for the Big Rapids trail, she still sat, in a mist of grief, swinging her little feet from Pale Peter's sidewalk. A quaint, appealing, shy little figure, indeed, she was, with downcast gray eyes, but rosy-cheeked, withal, and dimpled, too, notwithstanding the gray blanket, and infinitely wistful in the summer sunshine. She was in sorrow, of course; not the most persistent of dimples, not gray-eyed twinkles of the most stout-hearted description, could conceal her woe, nor mitigate her appearance of desolation. But she *did* smile: once in a while, looking up from her little toes, she smiled, having with all her might summoned the courage with which to give to her woeful features the twist of a grimace. She was in the way, you see, of patching up her broken heart, after the admonition of Gray Billy Batch to be a little man. And she was in the thick of a desperate effort—and was determined to achieve her purpose—and had almost managed the last contortion of a courageous little grin—when John Fairmeadow, striding down, came abreast of the abandoned tote-wagon and caught sight of the queer little figure in black on the sidewalk beyond. It was impossible to proceed: John Fairmeadow involuntarily paused to stare; and his stare instantly exposed him to a gray-eyed flash, which immensely amused him, it was so frank, so wistful, so sad, so curious, so appealing and so glorious.

"How d'ye do?" said John Fairmeadow.

A gracious inclination failed to encourage him; and he passed on—but with twinkling backward glances—towards the mouth of the Big Rapids trail, wherein, in a moment, after a rough stride or two, he would have vanished in the silence and shadows of the forest, forever lost to Swamp's End, had not the providential dog fight summoned him back.

It was the dog fight, too, that intruded upon Pattie Batch's grieving vigil beside the tote-wagon and the gray blanket. It came in a growling, roaring, blaspheming rush from Pale Peter's bar. The blessed calm of day fled in shocked alarm before it. It startled the stolid black horses; it shook the tote-wagon's unheeding passenger. It flooded the sidewalk and overflowed on the dusty street. It drew a hurrying, swearing, howling contribution of sportive spectators from each of the thirty-two saloons to complete a brawling circle. It distracted the citizens of Swamp's End and the visitors from the woods from their accustomed employments at the Swamp's End bars; and eventually it introduced John Fairmeadow and Providence to the excited community. A worthy dog fight. Pale Peter's bulldog was concerned, being the aggrieved party to the dispute; and the other dog, the aggressor, was Billy the Beast from the Cant-hook cutting, a surly lumber-jack, who, being at the same time drunk, savage and hungry, had seized upon the bulldog's bone, in expectation of gnawing it himself. It was a fight to be remembered, too: the growls of man and beast, the dusty, yelping scramble in the street, the howls of the spectators, the blood and snapping, and the indecent issue, wherein Billy the Beast from the Cant-hook cutting sent the bulldog yelping to cover with a broken rib, and himself, staggering out of sight, with lacerated hands, gnawed at the bone as he went.

When the joyous excitement had somewhat subsided, John Fairmeadow, now returned from the Big Rapids trail, laid off his pack.

"Boys," said he, "I'm looking for the worst town this side of hell. Have I got there?"

"You're *what!*" Gingerbread Jenkins ejaculated.

"I'm looking," John Fairmeadow drawled, "for the worst town this side of hell. Is this it?"

"Swamp's End, my friend," said Gingerbread Jenkins, gravely, "is your station."

The crowd gave assent.

"Quite sure?" John Fairmeadow pleasantly inquired.

"My friend," Gingerbread Jenkins replied, "I could prove *at least* that much in favour o' this here town."

John Fairmeadow nodded approvingly.

"When I come t' think ca'mly about it," Gingerbread Jenkins went on, "I don't know but that this town *beats* hell. There's many a man has moved from here t' hell with the idea of improvin' his situation."

Again John Fairmeadow nodded.

"An' a damned sight more young women," Gingerbread Jenkins continued, "has packed up in a hurry, lemme tell you, an' done the same thing."

"That's all right, boys," said John Fairmeadow, heartily. "I like the town."

It was Gingerbread's turn to nod.

"I *like* it," Fairmeadow repeated, grimly. "It's just the kind of town I'm looking for; and I'm glad I've found it. It's *fine*, boys. I'm delighted. It seems to me," he went on, "that a man in my line might thrive in a live little burg like this. If you've no objection, boys, I'll settle."

There was a pause.

"Friend," Gingerbread Jenkins observed, inimically, "I don't quite place you.'

Fairmeadow smiled broadly. "This is my first visit to Swamp's End, sir," said he, bowing politely.

Gingerbread scratched his head.

"I hope," Fairmeadow proceeded, glancing about the scowling circle, his eyes alight with amusement, "some day to be better acquainted with all you gentlemen."

"I can't place you," Gingerbread Jenkins complained, advancing.

"My name's Fairmeadow."

"Yes," Gingerbread drawled; "but I can't jus' make out what you're *for*."

Fairmeadow settled himself solidly.

"You see, friend," Gingerbread Jenkins patiently elucidated, "it ain't quite plain what use you could be put to. You *look* like a honest an' self-respectin' lady-fingered bartender," he added, gently, "but you *might* be a horse-thief."

Fairmeadow bridled a little. "I chance to be neither," said he.

"No?"

"Neither."

"What *is* your line o' business?"

"Line?" Fairmeadow replied, with a broad grin. "Boys, I'm what you might call a parson!"

"A—a—wh-*what?*"

"Parson, by Jove!"

Gingerbread Jenkins implored, weakly, "Do you want a job?"

Fairmeadow perceived but could not account for a sudden stir and silence. He was not, however, permitted to answer the question. Plain Tom Hitch jerked Gingerbread Jenkins away from further blundering.

Well, of course, with this disclosure the affair had instantly taken a new aspect. The crowd withdrew a space, leaving John Fairmeadow alone with the little figure in the quaint black dress, by whom, however, he was not addressed. There was a great buzz of accusation, argument and persuasion from the frowzy crew near by; and John Fairmeadow, there being nothing else to do, awaited the issue of this, mystified but patient enough. What was said to Gingerbread Jenkins, at that crisis, heaven knows! That he was accused of having made it impossible for any individual of pious inclination to accept employment in that neighbourhood may go without saying. A lady-fingered bartender—a horse-thief! Hard enough, too, on poor Gingerbread Jenkins—himself desperate for a parson! Presently, however, the circle formed again about John Fairmeadow; and Gingerbread Jenkins advanced, again, now much crestfallen.

"I guess I made a mistake, parson, an' I 'pologize," said he. "*Are* you lookin' for a job?"

"That's just what I am!" said Fairmeadow.

"*As* a parson?"

"That's right, boys!"

"Would you mind," Gingerbread pursued, apologetically, "if I was t' ask you how you was on funeerials?"

The crowd attended.

"I bury," Fairmeadow replied, smiling, all unaware of the proximity of the gray blanket, "with neatness and despatch."

"Do it make any difference t' you," Gingerbread anxiously inquired, "which landin' a man makes?"

"Once the man is dead?"

"Yes," Gingerbread drawled; "once the man's *quite* dead."

"Not in the least."

"An' you're lookin' for a job in this section?"

"I am."

"No objection t' lumber-jacks?"

"I confess," Fairmeadow answered, grimly, "to a slight attraction."

"Got the Holy Scriptures on you?"

"I have."

"Handy?"

Fairmeadow produced them with satisfaction.

"Boys," said Gingerbread promptly, "hold up your right hands."

Aloft went every hand.

"Now, parson," Gingerbread went on, turning full upon Fairmeadow, and gravely, too, "the truth, the whole truth an' nothin' but the truth ——"

The rest, it seemed, had been forgotten.

"Anyhow," Gingerbread burst out, "so help me God, *you're elected!*"

Fairmeadow asked no question whatsoever. The sincerity of his call, indeed, was beyond question. It amazed him; he could not at all account for it. They felt the need of him, however; and he promptly took hold on the strange advantage. The situation passed into his control in a way to make the hearts of these simple men jump. He stepped quickly to the centre of the circle—a clean, stalwart young fellow, a man, in bearing, of the great proud and powerful world—and lifted his hand.

There was instant silence.

"Boys," said Fairmeadow, looking slowly roundabout upon the circle of grave and gaping faces, "I thank you for the call. It is gratefully accepted. In so far as God gives me strength and wisdom—in so far as He helps me to keep my heart pure, my purpose uplifted, my love undivided—I will serve both you and Him in these His woods. So help me Almighty God! Amen."

This was the call and installation of the Reverend John Fairmeadow.

V

PICK AND SHOVEL

PRESENTLY informed of his first ministerial office, and presented to the object of his consoling services, John Fairmeadow said, "All right, boys!" and his parishioners returned to the saloons with a relieved whoop, in which the concern of Gingerbread Jenkins vanished. The parson, you see, was "on the job," and it was purely a parson's employment; the mere mourners might indulge grief without any haunting sense of responsibility, and at once began to do so, with the eighteen hundred dollars. John Fairmeadow was precipitately abandoned. There remained the gray blanket—there remained Dennie the Hump, Pale Peter's sweeper—there remained the quaint, shy little figure in black, now blushing and dry-eyed, who presented her hand, with a grand air of fashion, and remarked that she was "pleased to make" John Fairmeadow's acquaintance. The gray blanket expressed no interest whatsoever in the affair; but Dennie the Hump volunteered to contrive a coffin of the shreds of packing-boxes, which, said he, if unsightly to the finical eye, would yet hold together until it should repose where no further disturbance could endanger it. This generous assistance John Fairmeadow promptly accepted, promising to look in upon the job, and complete it, and reverently fulfill its purpose, when he had finished with the pick and shovel. The tote-wagon was then driven to Pale Peter's barn; and there Dennie the Hump began industriously to ply his hammer and saw, in delight with his useful and conspicuous occupation.

Presently John Fairmeadow had obtained the implements required by this ministerial exigency. "Now, my dear," said he, resolutely, to Pattie Batch, "where shall we go?"

Pattie Batch stared horrified at the pick and shovel.

"You know what I mean, don't you?" Fairmeadow asked.

"There isn't no cem-e-tree," Pattie Batch replied.

"Choose, then," said Fairmeadow, "some pleasant place."

"There's a place for graves," Pattie volunteered, with interest.

Fairmeadow shouldered his pick and shovel. "The very spot!" said he.

"There isn't many graves, neither," Pattie went on; "there's jus' a few."

Fairmeadow reflected sadly that one would presently be added to the number.

"Jus' some girls," Pattie sighed.

Fairmeadow was not attending; he heard—but, unused to the ways of Swamp's End, did not comprehend. He was engaged in a tenderly sympathetic consideration of the odd little figure trotting beside him with awkwardly lifted skirt.

"*You* know," Pattie Batch continued, in the way of the wise to the wise.

It occurred to Fairmeadow that the child was complaining of the graveyard.

"No, no!" Pattie cried.

Fairmeadow wondered at her vehemence.

"No, no!" she repeated, in a passion of determination. "I want pop buried there!"

"Of course, you do," Fairmeadow soothed her.

"Near—me," she whispered.

"You mustn't think of *that*, my dear," Fairmeadow urged. "You're so young—to think of that."

"I *got* t'."

"Oh, no; not yet, surely."

"Yes, I have," Pattie replied; "it's *got* t' be thought of—now that pop's dead. I got t' be a li'l' man."

The graveyard lay in sunshine, a little breeze playing softly with the long grass, the whole freshly green and eager, after the warm rains, and brilliantly spread with flowers. It was at the edge of the clearing; the forest came close: Fairmeadow could peer into its dim, tangled recesses, and could hear the chirp and twitter and rustle of its busy little living things. Gray Billy Batch had been preceded in the eternal occupancy of this serene field. There were four graves. Three were unkempt and unloved—nameless, forgotten, fallen in, overgrown. But one small mound was newly trimmed; and wreaths of fresh-plucked wild blooms lay upon it, smiling to the blue sky.

"That's Mag's li'l' baby," Pattie explained.

"Mag's?" Fairmeadow absently asked.

"Yep," Pattie replied; "it's been dead a awful long time."

Fairmeadow wondered where Gray Billy Batch might most comfortably lie.

"Mag loves it yet," said Pattie; "an' she says she *always* will."

Fairmeadow struck his spade into the ground.

"She says," Pattie concluded, "that she jus' simply can't *help* it."

While Fairmeadow laboured—and until the last spading of cool red earth was cast up—Pattie Batch, squatting cross-legged in the grass, and much pleased with her companion, chattered amiably, between periods of gentle weeping. She seemed to cling to this companionship: there was no one else, you see, and there would presently be no one at all; and she was entertaining, of course—as well as one could be whose heart was breaking—to enlist sympathy and to prolong the interval of relief from loneliness. She would be alone, soon enough—alone in the cabin at the edge of the woods—quite alone—God knew! though John Fairmeadow was not aware of it. And the little thing, dabbing occasionally at her misty gray eyes with the sleeve of her mother's gown, chattered away, to chase off her grief and the besieging expectation of being alone. Mag's baby, it seemed, had come long ago, to surprise her; and Mag, it seemed, lived in the shuttered red house at the foot of the slope, and was Pattie Batch's friend. What would Pattie Batch do, now that her father was dead? Pattie Batch didn't know; but Pattie Batch knew what she *could* do, you bet! She hadn't made up her mind—not yet. She would think it over—by and by—after the fun'l, maybe. She was not afraid. Oh, my, no! And, anyhow, Mag was her friend.

"I know," said she, shrewdly, her great gray eyes wide in innocent regard of John Fairmeadow, "what *I* can do."

The grave was dug.

"Come, child," said Fairmeadow, oppressed; "there is no more to be done here."

"I ain't a child," she replied.

"No?" said he, absently.

She looked up shyly through her long lashes.

"I'm almost nearly eighteen," said she, with satisfaction.

Fairmeadow had not attended to the chatter of Pattie Batch. But Fairmeadow is not to be blamed for this. Fairmeadow was not used to the ways of Swamp's End—not aware of the teaching of its accepted customs—not afraid for its innocents—not remotely acquainted with the deadly perils its way of living had created and clothed with an aspect of security and propriety—not yet apprised by experience of the nets which avarice had spread for unknowing youth. So Fairmeadow is not harshly to be judged for his stupidity: Fairmeadow had been preoccupied in melancholy musing upon this death. He had brooded sadly, through all Pattie Batch's chattering; and he had, but in no comprehending way, considered the forsaken little chatterer, whose words, inconsequent to his ear, had yet been great and solemn with the news he did not heed. Desolate little Pattie Batch! Gray-eyed, forsaken, quaint little Pattie Batch! Something must be done for the child. It would be his first ministerial concern, Fairmeadow determined, to inquire, to consider, to act in her behalf. After the funeral, perhaps: or to-morrow. To-morrow, of course: early to-morrow, so that her desolation in this inimical world might be eased as soon as might be. To-morrow: to-morrow, of course, would do. For Fairmeadow, you see, was new to Swamp's End, and was not at all aware, as yet, that instant action was necessary in some cases. But he was to learn it.

"There's jus' one thing," Pattie declared, with emphasis, when they came abreast of the first wretched shack of the town.

Fairmeadow yielded the attention demanded.

"Will you *promise?*"

"Maybe," Fairmeadow indulged her.

"You *got* t'."

Fairmeadow nodded.

"Don't you have Billy the Beast for no pall-bearer," Pattie declared, her little teeth savagely bared; "he bit pop's ear off."

"Good Lord!" John Fairmeadow ejaculated.

It was a fine town! It was the worst town this side of hell, all right! It was just the lively little burg that John Fairmeadow had been looking for!

VI

SOWN IN DISHONOUR

IT was a distinguished success—the funeral of Gray Billy Batch. Swamp's End forever afterwards regarded it as having been *worth* eighteen hundred dollars; and the thirty-two proprietors rubbed their white hands and heartily concurred. There was some delay, in the beginning: Swamp's End was taken unaware by John Fairmeadow, who bustled from saloon to saloon, stuck his rosy face into each and shouted, "All ready, boys!" After this pardonable and quickly resolved confusion, however, the affair sedately progressed from Pale Peter's curb, with a thick "Get up, there!" from Plain Tom Hitch, to the accustomed rites, performed according to the forms in the grassy field behind the shuttered red house at the edge of the woods. Little Pattie Batch had nothing left to desire in respect to it; the hundred mourners from Bottle River, the Cant-hook and the Yellow Tail camps, were abundantly content with their grave share in the proceeding, and the eighteen hundred dollars were presently in a fair way of reposing in the cash-boxes of the thirty-two proprietors.

It is true that the long procession, going two-and-two behind the lumbering tote-wagon, and immediately preceded by the Reverend John Fairmeadow, with a black-clad little woman on his arm, was preternaturally solemn and indulgent of grief; it is true that the selfsame procession stumbled in rough places and was forever staggering—true that it paused, now and again, in twos and threes, to refresh its strength and mood—true that after these lapses from the line it found new lines of gravity to wear, other tears to shed, but no larger certainty of poise. Perhaps, in the polite world beyond the woods, its practices upon this occasion may discover condemnation. God knows! But the world of Swamp's End, accustomed and untutored, knew its own sincerity of sympathy with the black-clad little woman at the tail of the tote-wagon, and continued in happy satisfaction with its funereal behaviour.

And there was a parson, with an indubitably ministerial air and a veritable copy of the Holy Scriptures—and there was a coffin, exalted on the tote-wagon—and upon the coffin were masses of wild-flowers, of wondrous fragrance and glory, gathered by Dennie the Hump. It was all, you see, according to the traditions: nothing whatever was omitted. The lifted voice was heard, the birds twittered, the sky was blue, the wind flowed over the pines, and cloud-shadow and sunshine chased each other over the world, and the long grasses waved and the flowers nodded their heads, all uninterrupted by the passing tragedy, unheeding of it, as though it had no meaning, and grief no substance, just as they always do, in spring time, when the dead are laid away.

I am the resurrection and the life, saith the Lord: he that believeth in Me, though he were dead, yet shall he live: and whosoever liveth and believeth in Me shall never die. . . . We brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out. The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord. . . . Now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the first-fruits of them that slept. For since by man came death, by man came also the resurrection of the dead. . . . It is sown in corruption; it is raised in incorruption: it is sown in dishonour; it is raised in glory: it is sown in weakness; it is raised in power: it is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body. . . . Man that is born of a woman hath but a short time to live, and is full of misery. He cometh up, and is cut down, like a flower; he fleeth as it were a shadow, and never continueth in one stay. . . . Earth to earth, ashes to ashes, dust to dust. . . . I heard a voice from heaven saying unto me, Write, From henceforth blessed *are the dead who die in the Lord: even so saith the Spirit; for they rest from their labours.* . . .

Dust to dust, ashes to ashes—and once more the scattered earth rattled its last message and decree. It was all according to the forms, you see. Nothing was omitted by John Fairmeadow: nothing was left to desire. And Swamp's End was correspondingly gratified, and inspired, as well, to celebrate the departure of Gray Billy Batch and the advent of its own and established parson, for which event it had a lusty will, a sound constitution, and eighteen hundred dollars. No sooner had the exhausted procession returned to more congenial surroundings than the eighteen hundred dollars began a clinking rush over the thirty-two bars.

Pattie Batch went home alone to the shack which Gray Billy Batch had knocked together to house his treasure; but she did not turn her face towards the edge of the woods until she had watched the last man go to his companionable diversion. She idled in the street: she was lonely; she clung even to the sight of these other folk. It was coming, now, late in the afternoon. The breeze had fallen; the sun was sinking, wrapped in glorious garments, to its bed in the pines. Pattie Batch, arrived in the dooryard of the shack, wished, but in no complaining way, that she might have continued in the companionship of the men who had gone together to the saloons, and were at least not alone.

But, summoning a smile —

"I got t' be a little man," occurred to her.

It was lonely at home; the cabin was isolated, and still, and desolately vacant. Pattie Batch stared hopelessly around. It was hard, after all, to remember to smile. She sighed; she wished —a moment of agonizing dread—that she were a man.

But, compelling a brave smile —

"I got t' be a little man," she remembered.

Presently, having gathered some clothing into a bundle, and having possessed herself of a few simple keepsakes of her father's love, she took the road for Swamp's End. She did not turn to look upon all that she had left behind; she fancied, little innocent one! that she would soon come back again, for a little, not knowing, at all, that there was no returning upon the road her little feet now travelled.

"I got t' be a little man."

She went by Pale Peter's place; she passed the roaring saloons, and came, by and by, to the edge of town. Here she dawdled. The path was sweet with grass and flowers. She plucked an overflowing armful of blossoms; she sat down by the wayside, like a child, and wove of these fragrant jewels a chaplet for her young brow.

She made a wreath for her shoulders, she fashioned a pendant of white for her bosom, she encircled her wrists.

The dusk fell—warm and brooding.

"I *got* t' be a little man!" thought she.

She sighed a little—she sang a little—she cried a little. Then all at once she jumped up; and she wiped her tears away with the sleeve of her dead mother's gown, with resolute little rubs, and composed her wan face, and set her lips, and brushed her little nose into a more presentable condition, and smoothed her skirt. She turned, presently, towards the grim, bedraggled, shameless red house, her eyes shining innocently in rising expectation of delight; and she went forward with kindling courage, her head high, like one going into the world, in the shining hope of youth, for the first time to taste of life.

She knocked.

"My child!" John Fairmeadow called from the twilight.

Pattie knocked again.

"Child!"

She turned in doubt.

"Child!" Fairmeadow besought her, his voice rising in quick alarm. "Wait a moment!"

The door opened.

"Wait—oh, wait!"

Nobody appeared in the doorway. There was no voice of invitation. It was all dark within. Pattie advanced a step. She was restrained, then, by John Fairmeadow's hand.

"Come!" he entreated.

She hesitated.

"Come with me!" he commanded.

"I'm so pleased you come, sir," poor little Pattie Batch sobbed. "I was simply *so* lonely I couldn't stand it."

The door was softly closed upon the little thing's departure; and Pattie's friend, Mag, in the shadows within, came as near to sighing "Thank God!" as she very well dared.

And when big John Fairmeadow had stowed poor little Pattie Batch away in Gray Billy Batch's abandoned cabin at the edge of the woods—and when he had sustained the little thing with promises of good-will and companionship—and when he had listened with a heart acquainted with pain and the need of pity to this small story of daughterly love and desolation—and when he had learned anew the cruel power of Death and the despair its ancient Mystery unfailingly works in the world—and when dear little Pattie Batch had cried a little, and had smiled a little in the dusk, and had courageously dabbed at her wet gray eyes with the sleeve of her mother's black gown, and had vowed, with her little white teeth exposed, to be a little man, whatever happened, and had wiped her little red nose, and snuffled, and ejaculated, "Oh, shoot it, anyhow!"—and when, calling every ounce and inch of all the sweet bravery she possessed, or could by any stretch of the imagination pretend that she possessed, to aid her in this extremity, she had cheered up, in a way to win the astonished admiration of all mankind—when all this had come to pass in the tender dusk at the edge of the woods—and when John Fairmeadow had promised to come back in the morning—and when the downcast young fellow had come to the Bottle River trail to Swamp's End and had distracted his mind from the disconsolate state of Pattie Batch to the grim business lying ahead in Pale Peter's barroom at Swamp's End—John Fairmeadow heard his name wanly called.

"Hey, there!"

"Hello!" Fairmeadow responded.

"What—time—d' you—get—up?"

"What—time—d' *you?*"

"I'm—up—at—five."

"Good Heavens!" Fairmeadow ejaculated, under his breath; but he shouted, like a man, "All right, Pattie! I'll be out to breakfast!" and then went his way to man's business in town, determined to work a solution of Pattie Batch's hard problem, if he accomplished nothing else at Swamp's End.

VII

PALE PETER'S GAME

WHEN John Fairmeadow got back to Swamp's End from Pattie Batch's lonely cabin at the edge of the woods, the inebriated little town seemed to have gone to bed for the night. It was dark: the long, disjointed, bedraggled street was deserted. But the town had not gone to bed. Not by any means! The town was still celebrating the obsequies of Gray Billy Batch; and inasmuch as that singular function had been a gigantic success, and inasmuch as all sense of responsibility concerning it had vanished with the return from the green field beyond town, and inasmuch as there still remained a goodly portion of the eighteen hundred dollars, the town was heartily enjoying itself. Swamp's End was indoors. The saloons were crowded. Indisputable evidence of hilarity emerged from every open door. At Pale Peter's Red Elephant, where John Fairmeadow turned in, Charlie the Infidel was rushed beyond the power even of his quick hands and alert mind to keep up with the demand for his services. There was a roaring crowd at the bar; but strewn about the floor—and now and again kicked impatiently out of the way—there lay a dozen or more lusty fellows whom the celebration had utterly overcome. Fairmeadow was not disgusted. He did not withdraw in horror; nor did he weep and retire to pray. As a matter of fact—it may be hinted—John Fairmeadow had long ago become inured to scenes like this. There had been a time, moreover, when—but that is for a later telling. Fairmeadow, unobserved in the long, dim-lit room, now went to a shadowy corner, to which snatches of maudlin conversation, chiefly concerning himself, drifted from the noisy crowd. Fairmeadow's arrival, it seemed, had aroused a vast theological discussion, to which the potations of the night had contributed as much enlightenment as potations will.

Upon Gingerbread Jenkins the events of the day had produced a singular effect. He drank deep. Rather, he drank deeper. Gingerbread Jenkins always drank deep. But that was not all. Gingerbread Jenkins had washed his face and combed his hair and beard. Moreover, he had become preternaturally solemn; and the more often he had sidled up to Pale Peter's bar the more solemn he had grown. His demeanour at the bar did not in the faintest degree suggest frivolity: his voice was fallen to a whisper, he walked on tiptoe, his face did not lose a line of its heavy gravity. He whispered, "A li'l' licker, Charlie!" precisely in the manner of an elder saying, "Let us pray!" Earlier in the day—some time after the funeral, in fact, when, just at that moment, it had occurred to John Fairmeadow that little Pattie Batch might be in need—Gingerbread Jenkins had in an excited whisper suggested a revival to the new minister. "We ought t' wake the boys up," said he, "an' get 'em t' realize their lost condition, an' save 'em." And he had been somewhat disconcerted, and more than a little chagrined, to discover that John Fairmeadow would not enthusiastically fall in with this plan for a spiritual awakening of the community. But Fairmeadow had mollified him, and mightily heartened him, by threatening to make an elder of him yet, and adding, "By Jove, Gingerbread, I'm going to put you in the choir!" It was for this reason that Gingerbread had with much labour achieved the air and appearance of piety.

Gingerbread's first concern was with the moral condition of Pale Peter's young son, Donald, whom he lifted from the end of the bar, where the boy sat cross-legged, and whom he carried to a corner of the barroom, and took on his knee.

"Donnie," said he, "you ought t' go t' Sunday-school."

"What for?"

"We're goin' t' have a Sunday-school here," Gingerbread went on, "where you can go. Donnie, you *ought* t' go."

"What for?"

"T' be made into a good little boy."

"Did you go to Sunday-school?"

"I did that!'

"Did it make you a good little boy?"

Gingerbread started. "Well," he replied, at last, "it did."

"How long were you good?"

"Jus' as long as I went t' Sunday-school!" triumphantly.

"What do they do at Sunday-school?"

"Oh," Gingerbread drawled, "they learn the Golden Text."

"What's that?"

"It's a verse from Holy Scriptures."

"Do you know one?"

Gingerbread protested with interest that he knew the very shortest verse to be found in the Holy Scriptures from cover to cover. "An' I'll teach it t' you," said he.

"What is it?"

"You say it after me," Gingerbread replied. "Are you ready?"

Donnie nodded.

"'Jesus wept,'" said Gingerbread.

Donnie struggled from Gingerbread's knee in a rage.

"What's the matter?" Gingerbread demanded. "Why don't you say it?"

"I'm not allowed to swear."

"*That* ain't swearin'," Gingerbread protested.

"Is, too!" Donnie returned; "and I'd get licked if I said it."

The boy went off, in a flush of shame, and climbed again to the bar, from which more righteous situation he continued to view the scene. As for Gingerbread Jenkins, he mused heavily, for a time, and then looked about him, from the sots on the floor to Charlie the Infidel, who was perspiring in the effort to reduce more sots to the floor. Whereupon Gingerbread Jenkins sighed; and having sighed again—and yet in a more melancholy way for the third time—he muttered:

"Jesus wept, eh? I sh'uld think so!"

It was a genuine expression: Gingerbread Jenkins meant every word of it.

Fairmeadow felt a hand on his shoulder. It turned out to be Pale Peter's white hand. "Parson," Pale Peter whispered, "let me have a word with you, won't you?" Fairmeadow followed the saloon-keeper to a little office at the end of the bar—a cozy cubby-hole, partitioned and curtained from the great room, opening into the bar, through a red-curtained door, and looking out, through a red-curtained window, upon the street. Here Pale Peter had a desk, a safe, a little table and two great leather-covered easy chairs. He bestowed John Fairmeadow with much politeness in one of the chairs; and having himself taken the other, and having snipped the end from a cigar, and having lighted the cigar in a cynical muse, he blew a cloud of smoke towards the ceiling and all at once let his eyes fall penetratingly upon the minister. Fairmeadow had observed in the meantime that he was a well-groomed, easy-mannered man—a man of the world, apparently, as much at variance with the environment of that foul, roaring bar as the minister himself. But was he, after all, out of keeping? He was gray—gray-haired and gray-faced. No wonder they called him Pale Peter! He had no colour at all: even his thin, dry lips, shut tight in a straight line, were colourless; and his long, light-lashed eyes were pale in tone. His hands were white: slim, long-fingered hands, they were, adorned with one flashing diamond. Fairmeadow observed that he was immaculate as to linen and clad in the fashion—a smartly cut tweed, recently brushed and pressed.

"Parson," Pale Peter asked, abruptly, "what's the game?"

It was a soft, agreeable voice, dry and even; and a gentle smile accompanied it—a smile, however, touched with cynicism.

"The game," Fairmeadow replied, bluntly, "is on the square."

Pale Peter lifted his eyebrows.

"It's aboveboard," Fairmeadow repeated.

"Of course," Pale Peter agreed, with a polite inclination; "but what *is* it?"

"Just what you see," said Fairmeadow, "and nothing else. I propose, in so far as God gives me strength, to be a pastor to the boys."

Pale Peter looked John Fairmeadow over. "You don't look like a parson," said he.

"I'm not."

"No?" in mild surprise. "You *said* you were, you know!"

"I said that I might be called a parson."

Pale Peter lifted his eyebrows.

"I'm not yet a really truly minister," Fairmeadow laughed; "but I hope some day to be one. I'm only a lay preacher, more or less on probation. I have an arrangement with the Church. If I'm very, very good, and if I read up on systematic theology and church history and that sort of thing in my spare hours, and if I can pass a satisfactory examination, they will ordain me, in good time; and then I'll be a *real* minister. You see, I had no time to go to a theological seminary. I—I—wanted to get to *work*. I *had* to get to work. A year in the seminary was quite enough—for a man like me.

And when they proposed this arrangement I was delighted."

"Will they give you a square deal?"

"Oh, yes!"

"Look out for 'em, Jack."

"Oh," Fairmeadow laughed, "they'll give me a square deal."

Each man looked the other in the eye.

"I think," Pale Peter drawled, at last, "that you're on the level."

Fairmeadow bowed.

"I'm glad you've come," Pale Peter went on, heartily; "and I hope you'll stay."

It was Fairmeadow's turn to inquire:

"What's the game?"

"There's no game," Pale Peter answered. "I'm glad you've come," he added, "and I hope you'll stay."

Fairmeadow laughed. "What's the game?" he asked again.

"If I can help you in any way," said Pale Peter, ignoring the question, "let me know. I'll do my best."

"What's the game?"

Pale Peter drew the curtain aside and looked the length of the bar.

"Donnie!" he called.

The boy did not hear.

"Donnie!"

Donald came, then, in answer to his father's call. He was a straight, frank-eyed little fellow, not after Pale Peter's fashion, at all, but doubtless resembling, Fairmeadow fancied, his mother. He entered the little office shyly. For a moment he stood embarrassed. It seemed his father had forgotten him. The man's face was fixed in an affectionate smile; his eyes were bent upon the lad: but he seemed to be lost in a muse.

"Father?" the boy inquired.

"Donnie," said Pale Peter, abruptly, "shake hands with Jack Fairmeadow."

The boy shyly offered his hand, and Fairmeadow grasped it heartily.

"This," said Pale Peter, "is my son."

Fairmeadow began to comprehend.

"My only son," Pale Peter added. "His mother ——"

There was a pause.

"She's dead," Donnie put in.

"I see," said Fairmeadow. "And so"—turning to the saloon-keeper—"there *is* a game?"

"There is a game."

"I'll play it!" Fairmeadow ejaculated. "I'll play it for all I'm worth!"

Pale Peter smiled.

"Do you play against me?" asked Fairmeadow.

"Not at all; on the contrary, I'll help you all I can."

"The consequences may be unpleasant—for you."

"I think not."

"You'll not be warned?"

"I'd rather take the consequences."

Donald, bewildered by this dark exchange, and somewhat bored by it, went again to his seat on the bar.

Pale Peter said—and with some diffidence—to John Fairmeadow:

"Will you shake hands?"

"First of all, to define my attitude, and to define it exactly," Fairmeadow replied, rising, his face flushing, his eyes flashing, "I should like to express an opinion."

Pale Peter smiled. "Be as frank as you will," said he.

"You're a damned rascal!" Fairmeadow exploded.

"Now," said Pale Peter, softly, "will you shake hands?"

"I will."

They shook hands.

"I'm glad you've come, Jack," said the saloonkeeper, "and I hope you'll stay. You'll be good to the boy, won't you? You'll—teach him—what I can't teach him? You'll teach him—what his mother would have taught him had she lived? You see," Pale Peter added, "he has no mother. You see, he—oh, pshaw! You understand, don't you? The kid hasn't much of a chance here. I've been afraid he'd grow up to be—well—what he wouldn't naturally be. I reckon you understand. And I'm glad there's another kind of man in camp. You're the first man—of that kind—the kid ever saw. You see, I—I—can't do anything in that line. You'll give the kid a show, won't you?"

"I'll play the game," said Fairmeadow, grimly.

It was in this way that John Fairmeadow came to take up quarters at the Red Elephant. Pale Peter would not hear of his going elsewhere. "Not at all!" he exclaimed. "Why, parson, this is just the place to get your lumber-jacks. Be on the ground. You're welcome here. You can have the run of the place." Well and good! Fairmeadow settled down—if at any time of his career in the lumber-woods he may be said to have settled down—and was presently at home in his surroundings. No amazement was excited by his residence at the Red Elephant. It did not occur to the new minister's parishioners that there was anything extraordinary about it. It was agreed, in fact, that the arrangement was an admirable one. "Ain't he on the ground?" they said. "Ain't he near the bar?" The parishioners were quite willing to be taken care of. The parishioners *intended* to be taken care of.

What was a parson for? And with John Fairmeadow at the Red Elephant—with John Fairmeadow always within hail—they felt reasonably safe. A great friendship immediately sprang into life between the big parson and Pale Peter's Donald—a friendship which, in the end, was to astonish and concern Pale Peter. And Fairmeadow, going here and there upon the business of his parish, was presently on terms with not only the lumber-jacks of the near-by camps, but with the men from remoter sections, and had established himself at least on terms of trust with all the saloon-keepers of Swamp's End, who gave him, by a tacit understanding, the "run" of their "places."

In this way the summer was passed.

VIII

IN LOVE WITH A FLOWER

IT was near noon of a hazy Sunday morning in the fall of the year. The summer was gone: John Fairmeadow was now known to the lumber-jacks of all those woods from the Divide and the Logosh Reservation to the driving camps of the Big River. A hazy morning: the earth was yellow and languid and sweet to smell. There was balsam—there was tempered sunlight—in the air. A forest smoke, the fragrant mist of the season, was opalescent under a flushed sun. A lazy little breeze flowed over the pines and splashed odorously into the clearing of Swamp's End. It sportively eddied for a bit—an inquisitive little wind, too—and with a song and a sigh idled on to the shadowy forest reaches. In Pale Peter's bar the Saturday night sots—a frowzy crew of lumber-jacks—were stirring on the floor. Dennie the Hump, the sweeper, being wise, had not disturbed them, but would return with his broom and dust-pan when these sleeping dogs had carried their aches and their growling ill humour to the healing out-of-doors; he had left them lie in the litter and slime of the night where they had fallen. A breath of wind came in at the wide door, thrown open to the morning. It paused appalled beyond the threshold and fluttered back to cleaner places to gather resolution. Presently, however, confronted by plain duty, it returned in a dogged little rush: whereupon it swept the bar, and busily nosed the corners clean, and drove all the stale exhalations of debauchery out of the window, escaping disgusted in the wake. And off it whisked, with a sniff and a gasp, to the big odorous forest which encircled the clearing, glad to have this chance business satisfactorily accomplished.

Gingerbread Jenkins awoke.

"What was it I come here for, anyhow?" he wondered.

For a moment no explanation occurred to him; but presently he remembered. The business with which he was concerned was Plain Tom Hitch. There had been rumours about Plain Tom Hitch. Gingerbread Jenkins had come in from the Bottle River camps to investigate them; but he had arrived at the Red Elephant in time—in the nick of time—to participate in certain hilarious proceedings of a sort very much to his taste. The investigation had been delayed. But it was now impending. "Seems t' me, Peter," Gingerbread Jenkins remarked to Pale Peter, before he took the trail for Tom Hitch's cabin, "that if Plain

Tom Hitch has got separated and divorced from a bottle o' whiskey, there must be a Livin' Maker o' the World. There's so many dashed queer things goin' on hereabouts these days that I reckon Somebody's behind 'em. It ain't John Fairmeadow, neither. If Plain Tom Hitch has quit treatin' his body an' soul like a poor damned fool, God A'mighty managed it by the Will an' Mercy of Him. Plain Tom Hitch didn't do it; nor no more did John Fairmeadow. Thinks I, I'll take a small squint at Plain Tom Hitch an' find out for myself. An' so, Peter," Gingerbread concluded, "I'm on the way t' Tom Hitch's t' look the ill-bred fightin' beast over with my own eyes."

With that Gingerbread set out.

Plain Tom Hitch lived on a homestead grant—a small clearing in the woods—two miles out of Swamp's End on the Cant-hook trail. He was employed through the week at the Cant-hook cutting; but of a Saturday night it was his custom to return to his little grant of land. His wife was dead. Rowl, the old Bottle River scaler, maintained that she had died of the drink that Tom Hitch drank. But Tom Hitch had a daughter left—a maid of sweet age and looks—she was turning nineteen—to keep the cabin for him. Tom Hitch was now at home. Gingerbread found him sitting in a rocking-chair on the porch of the cabin, with Jinny, dressed out in her Sunday best, looking off at the sunset over the pines, as though waiting, perhaps, for the image of some shy dream to come dressed in heavenly light to her little feet. It was evening, then: the day was near done, and the last breeze was blowing soft and warm.

"Tom Hitch," Gingerbread ejaculated, when he got hold of Tom Hitch's hand, "what in the livin' thunder have you been doin' t' yourself?"

Tom Hitch looked up.

"Why, Tom," Gingerbread ran on, "they'd lie who called you *Plain* Tom Hitch this day! You're borderin' on the handsome."

"Ain't been doin' nothin' much t' myself," said Plain Tom Hitch; "jus' washed my face."

"Get out!" Gingerbread scorned.

"Don't remember nothin' more," said Tom Hitch.

"Soap an' water do *that* t' your face?" Gingerbread inquired.

"Didn't use nothin' else, Gingerbread."

"I wouldn't have believed," said Gingerbread Jenkins, "that carbolic acid could accomplish so much on the traces o' sin."

"No," Tom Hitch agreed; "me neither."

"What you got there?"

"I got a flower."

"Thunderation!" Gingerbread ejaculated.

"A flower! What in blitherin' thunder are you doin' with a flower?"

"I'm usin' it for a book-mark," Tom replied; "but that ain't what I'm *doin'* with it."

"No?"

"No," said Tom; "not by no means. I'm *really* enjoyin' its society."

"Tom Hitch," Gingerbread demanded, "have you lost your mind?"

"No," said Tom; "not by no means. I jus' found out that there *is* flowers," said he; "an' I'm s'prised, an' I'm pleased. I like 'em: I'm glad I got t' know 'em."

"What you readin'?" Gingerbread inquired.

"I'm readin' my Bible."

"What you doin' that for?"

"I jus' been made acquainted with God."

"Whew!" Gingerbread whistled. "Who done that t' you?"

"John Fairmeadow kindly introduced me," Tom placidly replied, "in the snake-room o' Pale Peter's place, a fortnight ago come Tuesday, in the evenin'. John Fairmeadow introduced me; but I struck up the real friendship for myself. I'm glad I done it, too. I like God: I'm glad I got t' know Him. He's a poor reputation for sociability, 'tis true, especially among the young; but I'm in a position t' say that once you get really well acquainted with Him there's no end t' the sociability He's able for. He's good company. He's grand company. I enjoy His conversation. I'm glad I know Him. I'm glad I got Him for a friend. I tell you, Gingerbread," says he, "I'm almighty *fond* o' God!"

"What par-tick-a-lar brand o' fool are you, anyhow?" Gingerbread frankly demanded.

"I ain't no fool, at all," Plain Tom Hitch protested. "Not by no means! That's jus' what I ain't."

"Then," said Gingerbread, "what you talkin' like a fool *for?*"

"I ain't talkin' like a fool."

"You are, too," Gingerbread insisted. "I never heard a real fool do worse."

"I'm not talkin' like a fool, at all," Tom Hitch went on, gravely. "You only think so because you ain't been used t' that style o' conversation. Maybe you don't like the words I use; but if I was you I wouldn't let a little thing like that throw me off the track o' truth. I tell you, Gingerbread, I'm talkin' an almighty big wisdom that I jus' found out about! You think I don't mean what I say? I *do* mean it. You think I'm a dribblin' fool when I say that I enjoy God's conversation? Why, Gingerbread, that ain't foolishness; that's Truth. It says jus' 'xactly what I mean. It's real. God *is* my friend. I like Him: I'm wonderful fond of His company. 'Hello, Tom Hitch!' says He, last night, when I was comin' out from Swamp's

End in the starlight. 'Goin' home? That's proper. What you been doin'?' says He. 'Lookin' up at all them stars? I wouldn't do that too much, my boy,' says He. 'Them little stars,' says He, 'is a pretty tough proposition for a man like you. You'd find me there, all right, if that's what you was lookin' for; but you might be frightened when you saw me. I'll tell you what you do,' says He. 'It looks t' me, jus' now, as if t'-morrow might be a fine sunny mornin' for this time o' the year. You go out in the woods. I'll be waitin' there; an' you an' me will have a nice quiet time t'gether, lookin' at the flowers I made. I'm proud o' them,' says He. 'They're lovely; an' I'm glad I have the power an' the heart t' think them into life. You'll enjoy yourself all alone in the woods with me,' says He. 'Anyhow,' says He, 'I'll enjoy myself with *you*.' An' that's how," said Tom Hitch, "I happen t' hold this here little flower in my hand. All day t'-day," he added, "I've had a wonderful good time with the little thing."

"Ye fool!" said Gingerbread Jenkins.

"That's awful funny, Gingerbread," Tom Hitch replied, without resentment. "I look like a fool t' you," he went on, "an' you look like a fool t' me. Funny, ain't it? But *I'm* satisfied."

"What?" Gingerbread ejaculated. "Satisfied? Where's your bottle o' whiskey, Tom Hitch?'

"I've put my bottle o' whiskey," Tom answered, "where it belonged before I got it."

"Then," said Gingerbread, "it's not far from your gullet."

"It's jus' as far away from here," Tom Hitch insisted, "as anywhere in the world is."

"I hope you've chained it," said Gingerbread, doubtfully; "it might get loose an' bite you."

"It won't be no trouble t' me no more," said Tom Hitch. "Why, Gingerbread," he went on, "my soul is turned towards Light. I've found peace; an' jus' as long as I can fall asleep like a child at night—an' by day walk the open world with neither terror nor shame—I think I'll stand pat with the cards I hold, whatever any man may think the hand I got is worth in the game. Bottle o' whiskey?" said he. "Look!"

He held up the little flower for Gingerbread to see.

"'Tis the handiwork o' my Friend," said Tom Hitch. "This mornin' He made me the gift of it. I love it. You've simply no idea, Gingerbread, how common an' ornery a bottle o' whiskey looks when ——"

"When what?" Gingerbread inquired.

"When you've once fell in love with a flower!"

There came a time—and the time was not far distant—when Tom Hitch staggered out to little Jinny from Swamp's End. It was raining, that night. The first big, black drops of a three days' rain had begun to fall. It was a dark November night—black and wet in the woods—with a storm of cold wind coming down from the Northwest. Jinny met him—took him by the hand at the cross-trails by Swamp's End—and led him home by the hand like a child. And three days later John Fairmeadow came in from the Last Chance camps on Ragged Stream, where the news of Tom Hitch had gone. It was a bad day for a man to be abroad in the swamps. It was a worse night to foot the trail from Dead Man's ferry. There was now a rush of rain against the window-panes of Tom Hitch's cabin; there was now the patter of hail on the roof. And the big wind from the Northwest was threshing the forest and crying at the door. John Fairmeadow was wet to the skin. He bled from the wounds of the muskegs: he was splashed to the eyes with the mud and dead leaves of the last trail. It is a matter of thirty miles from the Last Chance camps to Swamp's End. John Fairmeadow had come it that day, God knows how! by the short cut through Cedar Long Swamp. He had come, however; and he came just in time to pass judgment on Plain Tom Hitch and to intervene with his more righteous justice—all of which shall be told in its place.

All this, however, was for the future. On the placid evening when Tom Hitch sat with Gingerbread Jenkins on the porch of his little cabin, it was not in prospect.

"Gingerbread," said Tom Hitch, "*you* better turn over a new leaf."

Gingerbread pondered.

"Eh?" said Tom Hitch.

"I reckon," Gingerbread replied, "that I'll get married an' settle down."

"You'll—get—married, Gingerbread?" Tom Hitch drawled.

"Sure!" said the confident Gingerbread; "nothin' like a little matrimony t' straignten a man up."

Tom Hitch stared.

"You watch *me!*" Gingerbread Jenkins declared.

IX

THE WISTFUL HEART

IT was long after noon in the far, big, white Northwest. Day was on the wing. Christmas Eve splendidly impended—thank God for unspoiled childish faith and joys of children everywhere! Christmas Eve was fairly within view and welcoming hail, at last, in the thickening eastern shadows. Long Day at its close. Day in a perturbation of blessed unselfishness. Day with its tasks of love not half accomplished. And Day near done! Bedtime coming round the world on the jump. Nine o'clock leaping from longtitude to longtitude. Night, impatient and determined, chasing all the children of the world in drowsy expectation to sleep—making a clean sweep of 'em, every one, with her soft, wide broom of dusk. "Nine o'clock? Shoo! Off you go! To-morrow's on the way. Soon—oh, soon! To-morrow's here when you fall asleep. Said 'em already, have you? Not another word from either of you. Not a whisper, ye grinning rascals! Cuddle down, little people of Christ's heart and leading. Snuggle close—closer yet, my children—that your arms may grow used to this loving. Another kiss from mother? Blessed Ones! A billion more, for nights and mornings, for all day long of all the years, waiting here on mother's lips. And now to sleep. Christmas *is* to-morrow. Hush! To-morrow. Yes; to-morrow. Go t' sleep! Go t' sleep!" And upon the flying heels of Night—but still far over seas from the blustering white Northwest where Pattie Batch was waiting at Swamp's End in the woods—the new Day, with jolly countenance, broad, rosy and delighted, was somewhere approaching, in a gale of childish laughter, blithely calling in its westward sweep to all Christian children to awaken to their peculiar and eternal joy.

It was Christmas weather in the big woods: a Christmas temperature like frozen steel—thirty below in the clearing of Swamp's End—and a rollicking wind, careering over the pines, and the swirling dust of snow in the metallic air. A cold, crisp crackling world! A Christmas land, too: a vast expanse of Christmas colour, from the Canadian line to the Big River—great, grave, green pines, white earth and a blood-red sunset! The low log-cabins of the lumber camps were smothered in snow; they were fringed with pendant ice at the eaves, and banked high with drifts, and all window-frosted. The trails were thigh deep and drifting. The pines—their great fall imminent, now—flaunted long, black arms in the gale; they creaked, they swished, they droned, they crackled with frost. It was coming on dusk. The deeper reaches of the forest were already dark. Horses and teamsters, sawyers, road-monkeys, axemen, swampers, punk-hunters and all, floundered from the bush, white with dry snow, icicled and frosted like a Christmas cake, to the roaring bunk-house fires, to a voracious employment at the cooks' long tables, and to an expanding festival jollity. Town? Sure! Swamp's End for Christmas—the lights and companionship of the bedraggled shanty lumber-town in the clearing of Swamp's End! Swamp's End for Gingerbread Jenkins! Swamp's End for Billy the Beast! Swamp's End—and the roaring hilarity thereof—for man and boy, straw-boss and cookee, of the lumber-jacks! Presently the dim trails from the Cant-hook cutting, from the Bottle River camps, from Snook's landing and the Yellow Tail works, poured the boys into town—a lusty, hilarious crew, like loosed school-boys on a lark, giving over, now, to the only distractions, it seemed—and John Fairmeadow maintained it—which the great world provided in the forests.

Pattie Batch might have been aware of this—the log shack was on the edge of town—had not the window-panes been coated thick with Christmas frost. She might have heard rough laughter passing by—the Bottle River trail ran right past the door—had not the big Christmas wind snored in the stove, and fearsomely rattled the door, and shaken the cabin, and swept howling on. But she never in the world would have attended. Not in that emergency! She would not, for anything, have peeped out of the windows, in perfectly proper curiosity, to watch the Bottle River jacks flounder into town. Not she! Pattie Batch was busy. Pattie Batch was so desperately employed that her swift little fingers demanded all the attention that the most alert, the brightest, the very most bewitching gray eyes in the whole wide world could bestow upon anything whatsoever. Christmas Eve, you see: Day done. Something of soft fawn-skin engaged her, it seemed, with white patches matched and arranged with marvellous exactitude: something made for warmth in the wind—something of small fashion, but long and indubitably capacious—something with a hood. A little cloak, possibly: I don't know. But I am sure that it could envelop, that it could boil or roast, that it could fairly smother—a baby! It was lined with golden-brown, crackling silk, which Pattie Batch's mother had left in her trunk, upon her last departure, poor woman! from the sordid world of Swamp's End to regions which were now become in Pattie Batch's loving vision Places of Light. And it was upon this treasured cloth that Pattie Batch's flashing needle was working like mad in the lamplight. A Christmas sacrifice: it was labour of love and the gift of treasure.

Pattie Batch was lovely. Everybody knew it; and there's no denying it. Grief had not left her wan and apathetic. She had been "a little man." She had been so much of a little man that she was now much more of a little woman than ever she had been before. In respect to her bewitching endearments, there's no mincing matters, at all. It would shame a man to 'hem and haw and qualify. She was adorable. Beauty of youth and heart of tenderness: a quaint little womanly child of seventeen—gowned, now, in a black dress, long-skirted, to be sure! of her mother's old-fashioned wearing. Gray eyes, wide, dark-lashed, sun-sparkling and shadowy, and willful dark hair, a sweetly tilted little nose, a boyish, masterful way, coquettish twinkles, dimples in most perilous places, rosy cheeks, a tender little figure, an aristocratic toss to her head: why, indeed—the catalogue of her charms has no end to it! Courage to boot, too—as though youth and loveliness were not sufficient endowment—and uncompromising honesty with herself and all the world. She took in washing from the camps: there was nothing else to do, with Gray Billy Batch lost in Rattle Water, and now decently stowed away by the Reverend John Fairmeadow. It was lonely in Gray

Billy Batch's cabin, now, of course; it was sometimes almost intolerably so—and ghostly, too, with echoes of long-past footsteps and memories of soft motherly words. Pattie Batch, however, a practical little person, knew in her own mind, you must be informed, exactly how to still the haunting echoes and transform the memories into blessed companions of her busy, gentle solitude; but she had not as yet managed the solution.

Pattie Batch wanted a baby. Companionship, of course, would be a mere by-product of a baby's presence in the cabin; the real wealth and advantage would be a glowing satisfaction in the baby. At any rate, Pattie Batch wanted one: she always had—and she simply couldn't help it. Babies, however, were not numerous at Swamp's End; in point of fact, there was only one—a perfectly adorable infant, it must be understood, a suitable child, and worthy, in every respect, of being heartily desired by any woman—which unhappily belonged to the bartender who lived with Pale Peter of the Red Elephant saloon. No use asking for *that* baby! Not outright. It could be borrowed, however. Pattie Batch *had* borrowed it; she had borrowed it frequently, of late, and had mysteriously measured it with a calculating eye, and had estimated, and scowled in doubt, and scratched her head, and pursed her sweet red lips, and had secretly spanned the baby, from chin to toe and across the back, with an industriously inquiring thumb and little finger. But a borrowed baby, it seems, is of no use whatsoever; the satisfaction is said to be temporary—nothing more—and to leave a sense of vacant arms and a stinging aggravation of envy. So what Pattie Batch wanted was a baby to *keep*—a baby she could call her own and cherish against meddling—a baby that should be so rosy and fat and curly, so neat and white, so scrubbed and highly polished from crown to toe-nails, that every mother in the land, beholding, would promptly expire on the spot of amazement, incredulity and sheer jealousy.

There were babies at Elegant Corners—a frowzy, listless mud-hole of the woods, near by. They were all possessed by one mother, too. The last comer had appeared in the fall of the year; and Pattie Batch—when the great news came down to Swamp's End—had instantly taken the trail for Elegant Corners.

"Got another, eh?" says she, flatly, to the wretched Mrs. Limp.

"Uh-huh!" Mrs. Limp sighed and rolled her eyes, as though, God save us! the ultimate misfortune had fallen upon her. "Number eight," she groaned.

"Don't you *like* it?" Pattie demanded, hopefully.

Mrs. Limp was so deeply submerged in tears that she failed to commit herself.

"You *don't* like it, eh?" Pattie pursued, hope immediately abounding.

Mrs. Limp sniffed.

"Well," said Pattie, her little heart all in a flutter—she was afflicted, too, with an adorable lisp in excitement—"I th'pothe I *ought* t' be *thorry.*"

Mrs. Limp seemed dolefully to agree.

Pattie Batch came then straight to the point. "I been thavin' up," said she. "I been hard at it for more 'n theven monthth."

Mrs. Limp lifted her blue eyelids.

"Yep," said Pattie, briskily; "an' I got thirty-four twenty-three right here in my thkirt. *Where'th that baby?*"

The baby was fetched and deposited in her arms.

"Boy or girl?" Pattie inquired, with business-like precision.

"Boy," Mrs. Limp sighed, "thank God!"

Pattie Batch was vastly disappointed. She had fancied a girl. It was a shock, indeed, to her ardour. It was so much of a shocking disappointment that Pattie Batch might easily have wept. A boy—a *boy!* Oh, shoot! But still, she reflected, considering the scarcity, a boy—this boy, in fact, cleaned up—Pattie Batch was all the time running the mottled infant over with sharply appraising eyes—yes, the child had possibilities, unquestionably so, which soap and water might astonishingly improve—and, in fine, this little boy might—

"Mithuth Limp," said Pattie, looking that lady straight in the eye, "I'll give you twenty-five dollarth for thith here baby. By George, I will!"

The astonished mother jumped out of her chair and her lassitude at the same instant.

"Not another thent!" Pattie craftily declared. "Here—take your baby."

Mrs. Limp did not quite *take* the baby. That would be but a pale indication of the speed, directness and outraged determination with which she acted. She snatched the baby away, with the precision of a brisk woodpecker after an escaping worm; and she hugged it until it howled for mercy—and she hushed it—and she crooned endearment—and she kissed the baby with such fervour and persistency that she saved its puckered face a washing. And then she turned—in a rage of indignation—in a storm of scorn—in a whirlwind of execration—upon poor little Pattie Batch. But Pattie Batch was gone. Discreet little Pattie Batch didn't need to be *told!* Her little feet were already pattering over the trail to Swamp's End; and she was crying as she ran.

But Pattie Batch's wish for a baby went back to the very beginnings of things. Ask Gingerbread Jenkins. Gingerbread Jenkins knows. It was Gingerbread Jenkins who had found her, long ago—Pattie was little more than a baby herself, then—on the Bottle River Trail; and to Gingerbread Jenkins' astonishment the child was lugging a gun into the woods.

"Where *you* goin'?" says Gingerbread Jenkins.

"Gunnin'."

"Gunnin', eh? What for?"

"Jutht gunnin'."

"But what you gunnin' *for?*"

"None o' your bithneth," says saucy little Pattie Batch.

"It *is* my business," Gingerbread Jenkins declared; "an' if you don't tell me what you're gunnin' for I'll have you home in a jiffy."

"Well," says Pattie, "I'm—gunnin'."

"What for?"

"Storks," says Pattie.

"Goin' t' *kill* 'em?" Gingerbread inquired.

"No," says Pattie.

"What's your gun for?"

"I'm goin' t' wing a couple," says Pattie, "an' tame 'em."

That was Pattie Batch.

X

A GIFT NEGLECTED

WELL, well! there was only one baby at Swamp's End; and that baby Pattie Batch had adopted. In her mind, of course: *quite* on the sly. Nobody could adopt Pale Peter's bartender's baby in any other way. And here was Christmas come again! Day gone beyond the last waving pines in a cold flush of red and gold: Christmas Eve here at last. Pattie Batch's soft arms were still wanting; there were a thousand kisses waiting on her tender lips for giving; her voice was all attuned to crooning sweetest lullabys; but her heart was empty—save for a child of mist and wishes. It was dark, now; but though the wind was still rollicking down there was no snow blowing, and the shy stars were winking wide-eyed upon the busy world and all the myriad mysteries it exhibited out-of-doors. The gift of silk and fawn-skin was finished. A perfect gift: fashioned and accomplished with all the dexterity Pattie Batch could employ. "Just as if," she had determined, "it was for my *own* baby." And Pattie Batch—after an agitated glance at the clock—quickly shoed and cloaked and hooded her sweet and blooming little self; and she listened to the lusty wind, and she put a most adorable little nose out-of-doors to sense the frosty weather, and she fluttered about the warm room in search of her mittens, and then she turned down the lamp, chucked a log in the stove, put on the dampers like a prudent householder, and, having made quite sure that the door was latched, scampered off to town in vast and twittering delight with the nipping frost, with the roistering wind, the fluffy snow, the stars, the whole of God's clean world, and with herself, too, and with the blessed Night of the year.

She was exceedingly cautious; and she was not observed—not for the smallest flash. The thing was accomplished in mystery. Before she was aware of it—before her heart had eased its agitation—she was safely out again; and there, in plain view, on the table, in Pale Peter's living-room behind the saloon, lay the gift of silk and fawn-skin for Pale Peter's bartender's baby—a Christmas mystery for them all to solve as best they could.

Pattie Batch peeked in at the window.

"I wonder," she mused, "if they'll *ever*—if they'll *ever in the world*—find out I done it!"

Presently Pale Peter's bartender came in. This was Charlie the Infidel. Pattie Batch rose on her cold little toes the better to observe. The frost exploded like pistol shots under her feet. She started. Really, the little mite began to feel—and rather exquisitely—like a thief in the night. There was another explosion of frost as she crept nearer her peek-hole in the glowing window. Whew! How deliciously mysterious it was! Nothing much, however, happened in Pale Peter's living-room to continue the thrill. Charlie the Infidel, in haste, chanced to brush the fawn-skin cloak off the table. He paused impatiently to pick it up, and to fling it back in a heap: whereupon he pressed on to the bar. *That* wasn't very thrilling, you may be sure; but Charlie the Infidel, after all, was only a father, and Pattie Batch, her courage not at all diminished, still waited in the frosty shadow, quite absorbed in expectation. Entered, then, Mrs. Bartender—a blonde, bored, novel-reading little lady in splendid array. First of all, as Pattie Batch observed, she yawned; secondly, she yawned again. And she was about to attempt the extraordinary feat of yawning a third time—and doubtless would have achieved it—when her washed blue eyes chanced to fall on the fawn-skin coat, with its lining of golden-brown silk shimmering in the lamplight. She picked it up, of course, in a bored sort of way; and she was positively on the very verge of being interested in it when—would you believe it?—she attacked the third yawn—or the third yawn attacked her—and however it was, the yawn was accomplished with such dexterity, such certainty, and with such satisfaction to the lady, that she quite forgot to look at the fawnskin cloak again.

"By George, she's tired!" Pattie Batch exclaimed to herself.

Pattie Batch sighed: she sighed twice, in point of fact—the second sigh, a great, long one, discovering itself somewhere very deep within—and then she went home disconsolate.

XI

THE MAKING OF A MAN

SOON after dark, John Fairmeadow, with a pack on his broad back, swung from the Jumping Jimmy trail into the clearing of Swamp's End, ceasing only then his high, vibrant song, and came striding down the huddled street, a big man in rare humour with life, labour and the night. A shadow—not John Fairmeadow's shadow—was in cautious pursuit; but of this dark, secret follower John Fairmeadow was not aware. Near the Café of Egyptian Delights he stumbled. The pursuing Shadow gasped; and John Fairmeadow was so mightily exercised for his pack that he ejaculated in a fashion most unministerial, but recovered his footing with a jerk, and doubtless near turned pale with apprehension. But the pack was safe—the delicate contents, whatever they were, quite undisturbed. John Fairmeadow gently adjusted the pack, stamped the snow from his soles, as a precautionary measure, wiped the frost from his brows and eyelids, in the same cautious wisdom, and, still followed by the Shadow, strode on, but with infinitely more care. At the Red Elephant—Pale Peter's glowing saloon—he turned in. The bar, as always, in these days, gave the young apostle to those unrighteous parts a roaring welcome. It was become the fashion: big, bubbling, rosy John Fairmeadow, with the square jaw, the frank, admonitory tongue, the tender and persuasive heart, the competent, not unwilling fists, was welcome everywhere, from the Bottle River camps and the Cant-hook cutting to the bunk-houses of the Yellow Tail, from beyond the Divide to the lower waters of the Big River, in every saloon, bunk-house, superintendent's office and cook's quarters of his wide green parish—welcome to preach and to pray, to bury, marry, gossip and scold, and, upon goodly provocation, to fight, all to the same righteous end. A clean man: a big, broad-shouldered, deep-chested, long-legged body, with a soul to match it—a glowing heart and a purpose lifted high. There was no mistaking the man by men.

John Fairmeadow, clad like a lumber-jack, upright, now, in the full stature of a man, body and soul, grinned like a delighted schoolboy. His fine head was thrown back, in the pride of clean, sure strength; his broad face was in a rosy glow; his great chest still heaved with the labour of a stormy trail; his gray eyes flashed and twinkled in the soft light of Pale Peter's many lamps. Twinkled?—and with merriment?—in that long, stifling, roaring, smoky, fume-laden room? For a moment: then closed, a bit worn, and melancholy, too; but presently, with reviving faith to urge them, opened wide and heartily, and began to twinkle again. The bar was in festive array: Christmas greens, red berries, ribbons, tissue-paper and gleaming tinfoil—flash of mirrors, bright colour, branches of pine, cedar and spruce from the big balsamic woods. It was crowded with lumber-jacks—great fellows from the forest, big of body and passion, here gathered in celebration of the festival. John Fairmeadow, getting all at once and vigorously under way, shouted "Merry Christmas, boys!" and "Hello, Charlie!" to the bartender; and he shook hands with Pale Peter, slapped Billy the Beast on the back, roared a greeting to Gingerbread Jenkins, exclaimed "Merry Christmas!" with the speed and detonation of a Gatling gun, inquired after Butcher Long's brood of kids in the East, and cried "Hello, old man!" and "What's the good word from Yellow Tail?" and "How d'ye do?" and "Glad t' see you!" and everywhere shook hands and clapped backs—carefully preserving, however, his own back from being slapped—and devoutly ejaculated "God bless you, men! A Merry Christmas to you all and every one!" and eventually disappeared in the direction of Pale Peter's living-quarters, leaving an uproar of genial delight behind him.

John Fairmeadow's Shadow, however, unable to enter the bar of the Red Elephant, waited in seclusion across the windy street.

Mrs. Bartender was still yawning as John Fairmeadow entered upon her *ennui*; but when the big minister, exercising the softest sort of caution, slipped off his gigantic pack, and deposited it with exquisitely delicate care, and a face of deep concern, on the table, she opened her faded eyes with interested curiosity. And as for the contents of the pack, there's no more concealing them! The article must now be declared and produced. It was a baby. Of course, it was a baby! The thing has been obvious all along. John Fairmeadow's foundling: left in a basket at the threshold of his temporary lodging-room at Big Rapids that very morning—first to John Fairmeadow's consternation, and then to his gleeful delight. As for the baby itself—it was presently unswathed—it is quite beyond me to describe its excellencies of appearance and conduct. John Fairmeadow himself couldn't make the attempt and escape annihilation. It was a real and regular baby, however. One might suggest, in inadequate description, that it was a plump baby; one might add that it was a lusty baby. It had hair; it had a pucker of amazement; its eyes, two of them, were properly disposed in its head; its hands were of what are called rose-leaf dimensions; it had, apparently, a fixed habit of squirming; it had no teeth. Evidently a healthy baby —a baby that any mother might be proud of—doubtless a marvel of infantile perfection in every respect. I should not venture to dispute such an assertion; nor would John Fairmeadow—nor any other bold gentleman of Swamp's End and Elegant Corners—*not in these later days!*

Mrs. Bartender, of course, lifted her languid white hands in uttermost astonishment.

"There!" John Fairmeadow exploded, looking round like a showman. "What d'ye think o' *that?* Eh?"

"But, Mr. Fairmeadow," the poor lady stammered, "what have you brought it *here* for?"

"Why not?" John Fairmeadow demanded. "Why not, indeed? It's perfectly polite."

"What am I to *do* with it?"

"It isn't intoxicated, my good woman," John Fairmeadow ran on, in great wrath; "and it's never been in jail."

"But my *dear* Mr. Fairmeadow, do be sensible; what am I to *do* with it?"

"Why, ah—I should think," John Fairmeadow ventured—the baby was still sleeping like a brick—"that you might first of all—ah—resuscitate it. Would a—a slight poke in the ribs—provoke animation?"

But the baby didn't need a poke in the ribs.

It didn't need any other sort of resuscitation. Not *that* baby! The self-dependent, courageous, perfectly competent and winning little rascal resuscitated itself. Instantly, too—and positively—and apparently without the least effort in the world. Moreover—and with remarkable directness—it demanded what it wanted—and got it. And having been nourished to its satisfaction from young Master Bartender's silver-mounted bottle (which John Fairmeadow then secretly slipped into his pocket)—and having yawned in a fashion so tremendous that Mrs. Bartender herself could never hope to equal that infinite expression of boredom—and having smiled, and having wriggled, and having giggled, and cooed, and attempted—actually attempted—to get its great toe in its mouth without extraneous assistance of any sort whatsoever—even without the slightest suggestion that such a thing would be an amazingly engaging trick in a baby of its age and degree—it burst into a gurgle of glee so wondrously genuine and infectious that poor, bored Mrs. Bartender herself was quite unable to resist it, and promptly, and publicly, and finally committed herself to the assertion that the baby was a dear, wherever it came from.

John Fairmeadow snatched it from the table, and was about to make off with it, when Mrs. Bartender interposed.

"My *dear* Mr. Fairmeadow," said she, "that child will simply catch its *death* of cold!"

There was something handy, however—something of silk and fawn-skin—and with this enveloping the baby John Fairmeadow swung in a roar with it to the bar—and held it aloft in all that seething wickedness—pure symbol of the blessed Christmas festival. And there was a sensation, of course—a sensation beginning in vociferous ejaculations, but presently failing to a buzz of conjecture. There were questions to follow: to which John Fairmeadow answered that he had found the baby—that the baby was nobody's baby—that the baby was his baby by right of finders keepers—that the baby was everybody's baby—and that the baby would presently be somebody's much-loved baby, *that* he'd vouch for! The baby, now resting content in John Fairmeadow's arms, was diffidently approached and examined. Gingerbread Jenkins poked a finger at it, and said, in a voice of the most inimical description, "Get out!" without disturbing the baby's serene equanimity in the slightest. Young Billy Lush, charging his soft, boyish voice with all the horrifying intent he could muster, threatened to "catch" the baby, as though bent upon devouring it on the spot; but the baby only chuckled with delight. Billy the Beast incautiously approached a finger near the baby's stout abdomen; and the baby—with a perfectly fearless glance into the very depths of the Beast's frowzy beard—clutched the finger and smiled like an angel. Long Butcher Long attempted to tweak the baby's nose ; but the effort was a ridiculous failure, practiced so clumsily on an object so small, and the only effect was to cause the baby to achieve a tremendous wriggle and a loud scream of laughter. These experiments were variously repeated, but all with the same cherubic result ; the baby conducted itself with admirable self-possession and courage, as though, indeed, it had been used, every hour of its life, to the company of riotous lumber-jacks in town.

The inevitable happened, of course : Billy the Beast, whose pocket was smoking with his wages, proposed the baby's health, and there was an uproarious rush for the bar.

"Just a minute, boys!" John Fairmeadow drawled.

It was an awkward moment: but the jacks were by this time used to being bidden by this man who was a man, and the rush was forthwith halted.

"Just a minute, boys," John Fairmeadow repeated, "for your minister!"

The baby was then held aloft in John Fairmeadow's big, kind, sensitive hands, and from this safe perch softly smiled upon the crowd of flushed and bearded faces all roundabout.

"Boys," John Fairmeadow drawled, significantly, "this is the only sort of church we have in these woods."

There was a laughing stir and shuffling: but presently a tolerant silence fell, in obedience to the custom John Fairmeadow had established; and caps came off, and pipes were smothered.

"A little away from the bar, please," the big preacher suggested.

Pale Peter nodded to Charlie the Infidel; and the clink of glasses ceased—and the bottles were left in peace—and the hands of the bartender rested.

"Now, boys," said John Fairmeadow, letting the foundling fall softly into his arms, "I'm not going to preach to you to-night, though God knows you need it! I'm just going to pray for the baby. *Dear Father of us wilful Children of the Vale*," he began, at once, lifting a placid, believing face above the smiling child in his arms, "*we ask Thy guardianship of this child. In us is no perfect counsel for him nor any help whatsoever that he may surely apprehend. In Thine acceptable wisdom Thou settest Thy little ones in a world where presently only Thou canst teach them: teach Thou then this little one. Thou alone knowest the right path for a little boy's inquiring feet: lead then this little boy. Thou alone art saving helper to an adventuring lad: help then this lad. Thou alone art all-perceiving* *and persuasive, alone art Truth Teller to a bewildered youth and Good Example in his wondering sight: be then Good Example and Teller of Truth to this youth. Thou alone art in the fashioning ways of Thine own world a Maker of Men: make then of this little child a Man. We ask no easy path for him—no unmanly way—no indulgent tempering of the winds. We pray for no riches—for no great deeds of his doing—for no ease at all nor any satisfaction. We ask of Thee in his behalf good Manhood. Lead him where true men must go: lead him where they learn the all of life; lead him where they level down and build again; lead him where in righteous strength his hands may lift the fallen; lead him where in anger he may strike; lead him where his tears may fall; lead him where his heart may find a pure desire. O Almighty God, Lover of children, Father of us all alike, make of this child, in the measure of his service and in the stature of his soul, a Man. Amen."*

Amen, indeed!

XII

CHRISTMAS EVE AT SWAMP'S END

AS for poor little Pattie Batch, all this while, she sat alone, a doleful heart, in the shack at the edge of the big, black woods, quite unaware of the momentous advent of a Christmas baby at Swamp's End. The Christmas wind was still high, still shaking the cabin, still rattling the door, still howling like a wild beast in the night, still roaring in the red stove; and snow was falling again—a dry dust of snow which veiled the wondering stars. It was no longer a jolly, rollicking Christmas wind. The gale, now, it seemed, was become inimical to the lonely child: wild, vaunting, merciless, terrible with cold. Pattie Batch, disconsolate, sighed more often than a tender heart could bear to sanction in a child, and found swift visions in the glowing coals, though no enlivening tableaux; but—dear brave and human little one!—she presently ejaculated "Shoot it, anyhow!" and began at once to cheer up. And she was comfortably toasting her shins, in a placid delusion of stormy, mile-wide privacy, her mother's old-fashioned long black skirt drawn up from her dainty toes (of which, of course, the imminent John Fairmeadow was never permitted to be aware), when, all at once, and clamouring above the old wind's howling, there was a tremendous knocking at the door—a knocking so loud, and commanding, and prolonged, that Pattie Batch jumped like a fawn in alarm, and stood for a moment with palpitating heart and a mighty inclination to fly to the bedroom and lock herself in. Presently, however, she mustered courage to call " Come in ! " in a sufficient tone : whereupon, the door was immediately flung wide, and big John Fairmeadow, with a wild, dusty blast of the gale, strode in with a gigantic basket, and slammed the door behind him, leaving the shivering, tenacious Shadow, which had secretly followed from Swamp's End, to keep cold vigil outside.

" Hello, there, Pattie Batch ! " John Fairmeadow roared. " Merry Christmas ! "

Pattie Batch stared.

" Hello, I say ! " John Fairmeadow cried, again. " Merry Christmas, ye rascal ! "

Pattie Batch, gulping her delight, and quite incapable of uttering a word, because of it, flew to the kitchen, instead of to the bedroom, and returned with a broom, with which, while the Shadow peeked in at the window, she brushed, and scraped, and slapped John Fairmeadow so vigorously that John Fairmeadow scampered into a corner and stood at bay.

"Look out, there, Polly Pry!" he shouted, in a rage; "don't you *dare* look at my basket."

Pattie Batch had been doing nothing of the sort.

"Don't you so much as *squint* at my basket," John Fairmeadow growled.

Pattie Batch instantly *did*, of course—and with her eyes wide and sparkling, too. It was really something more than a squint.

"Keep your eyes off that basket, Miss Pry!" John Fairmeadow commanded, again. "Huh!" he complained, emerging from his refuge and throwing his mackinaw and cap on the floor; "anybody 'd think there was something in that basket for *you*."

"There ith," Pattie Batch gasped, in ecstasy.

"Is!" John Fairmeadow scornfully mocked. "Huh!"

Pattie Batch caught John Fairmeadow by the two lapels of his coat—and she stood on tiptoe—and she wouldn't let John Fairmeadow turn his head away—(as if John Fairmeadow cared to evade those round, glowing eyes!)—and she looked into his gray eyes with a bewitching conglomeration of hope, amusement, curiosity and adoring childish affection. "There ith, too," she chuckled, her lisp getting the better of her. "Yeth, there ith. I know *you*, Mithter Fairmeadow."

John Fairmeadow ridiculously failed to smother a chuckle in a growl.

"Doth it bite?" Pattie Batch inquired, maliciously feigning a terrific fright.

"Nonsense!" John Fairmeadow declared; "it hasn't a tooth in its head." He added, with one eye closed, and palms lifted: "But—aha!—just you wait and *see*."

"Well," Pattie Batch drawled, "I th'pose it'th a turkey. It'th thertainly *thome*thin' t' eat," she declared.

"Good *enough* to eat, I bet you!" John Fairmeadow agreed, with the air of having concealed in that veritable big basket the sweetest morsel in all the world.

"Ith it a chicken?"

"Nonsense!" said John Fairmeadow; "it's fa-a-a-ar more delicious than chicken. Hi, there, Poll Pry!" he roared, and just in time; "keep your hands off."

"Is it anything for the house?"

"No, indeed; the house is for *it*."

Pattie Batch scowled in perplexity.

"The back yard, too," John Fairmeadow added; "and don't you forget that this whole place—and all the world—belongs to just what's in that basket."

"I'm sure," poor Pattie Batch mused, scratching her curls in bewilderment, "I can't guess what it *could* be."

Both were now staring at the basket; and at that very moment the blanket covering—*stirred!*

"Ith a dog!" Pattie Batch exclaimed.

"Dog!" the outraged John Fairmeadow roared. "Nothing of the sort! No *ma'am!*"

Pattie Batch clasped her hands. "It ith, too!" she cried. "I thaw it move."

"It is *not!*"

"Ith a kitten, then."

"It is *not* a kitten!"

Thereupon—while the Shadow, by whom John Fairmeadow had been dogged that night, now peered with acute attention through a break in the frost on the window-pane—thereupon, without any warning save a second slight movement of the blanket, a sound—and not by any means a growl—the thing was certainly not a dog—a sound proceeded from the depths of the basket.

Pattie Batch jumped away.

"Well, well!" cried John Fairmeadow; "what's the row?"

Row, indeed! Pattie Batch was gone white; and she swayed a little, and shivered, too, and clenched her little hands to restrain her amazing hope. "Oh," she moaned, at last, far short of breath enough, "tell me quick: ith it—ith it a —a ——"

John Fairmeadow threw back the blanket in a most dramatic fashion; and there, wrapped in the neglected fawn-skin cloak, all dimpled and smiling, lay —

THE BABY!

"By George!" screamed Pattie Batch; "it *ith* a baby!"

"Your baby," John Fairmeadow whispered. "God's Christmas gift—to you."

Pattie Batch—adorable young mother!—reverently approached, and, bending with parted lips, eyes shining, and hands laid upon her trembling heart, for the first time gazed content upon the little face. She lifted, then—and with what awe and tenderness!—the tiny mortal from the warm basket, and pressed it, with knowing arms, against her warmer, softer young breast. "My baby!" she crooned, her lips close to its ear; "my little baby—my own little baby!"

The Shadow vanished from the window and was never seen again.

Well, well, well! that wasn't all, you may be sure. It wasn't anything like all the interesting happenings of that Christmas Eve in the log shack on the edge of Swamp's End. Pattie Batch, for example, talked so much and so fast that her tongue stumbled and her breath positively refused to indulge her with another word without a rest. Girl! (says she); how in the world could she *ever* have *dreamed* that—well—and to think that she had actually *wanted* a girl when—sakes alive! a girl baby was *nothing* to a boy baby, once you *knew* about such things. And as for the lumber-jacks in town, who had—

and just like them, too, by George!—who had stuffed John Fairmeadow's mackinaw pocket with a perfect *fortune* for the baby—they were really *dears*, every one of them. And as for John Fairmeadow himself—well—never mind: Pattie Batch didn't say a single adequate word; but in the mad extravagance of her joy, and in a violent effort to express her gratitude, she *did* something that John Fairmeadow heartily approved, but never would have permitted, of course, had he not been taken unaware. The big gale laughed, now, and frolicked past the cabin, and tapped softly at the door, as if bound, through sheer importunity, to enter in and share the happiness. The roar was gone out of it: it was savage no longer. It hadn't a growl to its name: it hadn't even a ghostly groan to scare a child with. Who was afraid of the wind, now—of the cold—of the wild, black night? Not Pattie Batch. Pattie Batch's baby had tamed *that* gale!

By and by Pattie Batch resolutely returned the baby—now sound asleep—to the basket.

"I s'pose," says she, "I better get at Gingerbread Jenkins' washing."

"Washing?" cries John Fairmeadow.

"Yeth, yeth, yeth!" Pattie Batch declared, impatiently. "I got t' look out for the educathion o' my baby, don't I?"

As John Fairmeadow says—

"*You ought to see that baby now!*"

XIII

BILLY THE BEAST STARTS HOME

IT will be observed that by this time John Fairmeadow had found himself. He had not only found himself: he had discovered his parish. It was a big parish, as has been indicated; there were hundreds of square miles of it—miles of great woods remote from the restraints and fashioning influences of civilization. The parishioners numbered thousands—tens of thousands, perhaps, if John Fairmeadow could but have reached them. Not all of these men, but most of them, were hilariously in pursuit of their own ruin for lack of something better to do with their leisure in town. In camp—particularly in the remoter camps—they performed harsh labour and were for the time being clean-lived enough, perhaps; but in town it was another story, as the little settlements, founded chiefly to purvey evil to the lumber-jacks, took care that it should be. Being men of big strength in every physical way—and provided with every opportunity to indulge whatsoever variety of evil propensity they might chance to possess—they proceeded to the uttermost of savagery and degradation. It was done with shouting and laughter and that large good-humour which is bed-fellow with the bloodiest brawling, and the carousal had, perhaps, for the time, its amiable aspect; but the merry shouters soon became like Billy the Beast, who, having emerged from Pale Peter's saloon, upon the occasion of Fairmeadow's arrival, robbed the bulldog of his bone and gnawed it himself. Or they turned into men like Damned Soul Jones, who was used to moaning his way into the forest, after the spree in town, conceiving himself condemned to roast forever in hell, without hope, nor even the ease which his mother's prayers might win from a compassionate God. And every roisterer among them was prey—prey of the most helpless description—prey under the very noses of the authorities—for the saloon-keepers and gamblers of the towns.

"Expensive?" laughed a saloon-keeper's wife of Swamp's End, flashing a ring on her finger. "What do I care about expense? My husband has a thousand men working for him in the woods!"

As for John Fairmeadow —

"That's all right, boys," he used to say. "I'm your minister; and I'll stand by you as long as I have breath in my body."

Fairmeadow was "up against it." But Fairmeadow was a man of big body and stout heart.

And Fairmeadow "stood by." He was the only man in all those woods who did "stand by."

It was Billy the Beast who drew John Fairmeadow into his first grave altercation. The place was Pale Peter's saloon, the antagonist was Charlie the Infidel, and the manner of the thing I shall relate. Billy the Beast wanted to go home. Billy the Beast always wanted to go home. Never did a pay-day come near but Billy the Beast announced to the boys of the Cant-hook cutting that he was bound home. But Billy the Beast had never yet—never once in the ten years he had been trying—got farther on the way to the East than Swamp's End. Billy's mother had now sent for him, however, and Billy was bound to go. But Billy's old mother had for many years been sending for him; and Billy had never yet managed to get beyond Swamp's End. The time had come—the time had now come—when Billy must go; and determined at last to depart he sought the aid of John Fairmeadow. What was a parson *for?* Would John Fairmeadow help him? Yes; the parson would help. Would John Fairmeadow "see him through" Swamp's End? Yes; the parson would "see him through" Swamp's End. And if Billy the Beast chanced inadvisedly to stray into the Red Elephant with his wages in his pocket, would the parson knock him down, take his money away, put a ticket in his pocket and throw him in the baggage-car of the midnight train going east?

The parson would be delighted!

"All right, parson," said Billy the Beast; "you go jus' as far as you like."

"I *will!*" Fairmeadow returned, delighted. "I'll go the limit, Billy!"

"Kin I *depend* on ye?"

"You may, Billy," Fairmeadow answered, solemnly, a twinkle in his eye; "you may depend on me."

Secure in this guardianship, Billy the Beast bade the boys of the Cant-hook cutting a ceremonious farewell. "Goin' home," said he. "Ye see, boys, mother's sent fer me, an' I'm goin' home." It was the spring of the year, then: the drive was over; and Billy the Beast, his winter's wages in his pocket, took the trail for Swamp's End in high spirits. "Goin' home, boys," said he, to those whom he met by the way. "Ye see, my mother's sent fer me, an' I'm goin' home." John Fairmeadow was unfortunately not aware of the precise day of Billy's passage through Swamp's End. Billy had not informed him. Billy had *promised* to inform him, of course: he had been intimately particular to secure Fairmeadow's presence at Swamp's End "'long about Toosday." But it had gone no farther: Billy the Beast had neglected—"neglected" was the word he applied to it afterwards—to send the warning of his arrival. Perhaps—who knows?—the poor fellow, his lips dry for the diversions of Swamp's End, had already begun to fail in his purpose. However that be, Pale Peter's men—whose sources of such information were at that time superior to John Fairmeadow's—were apprised of his departure from the Cant-hook cutting long before he approached Swamp's End; and Knock-knuckle Jimmie, Pale Peter's cleverest "runner" was despatched to "fetch him in."

Knock-knuckle Jimmie succeeded.

"I wasn't intendin'," said Billy the Beast to Charlie the Infidel, "t' *have* a drink."

"It's on the house, Billy."

"Much 'bliged, Charlie," Billy replied; "but ye see—ye see—I been sent fer—an' I wasn't intendin' ——"

"A li'l' licker?" Charlie blandly inquired.

"It *would* be a li'l' licker, Charlie," said Billy, "if I was takin' *anything*. But ye see, I wasn't intendin' ——"

Bottle and glass were slapped on the bar.

"I wasn't intendin'," Billy repeated, his voice weakly trailing off, "t'—t'—t' take a—a ——"

"Water with it, Billy?"

"When I *take* it," Billy replied, "I take it *neat*. But, ye see, Charlie—this time I wasn't intendin' t' ——"

"Fill her up, man!"

"Wel-l-ll, jus' *one!*"

That was the end. Billy the Beast tossed the liquor off and wiped his beard. Charlie the Infidel smiled a convivial approval.

"Seen the parson?" Billy inquired.

It was a shamefaced question.

"Parson's at Bottle River," Charlie replied. "Have another."

"No more!" Billy protested. "That'll do fer *me*. Ye see, I been sent fer, an' I'm on my way—well, jus' *one* more."

It was the end, indeed.

It was night before the news of this came to the ears of John Fairmeadow. This was on the trail from the Bottle River. It was Monday. Tuesday had been the day fixed by Billy the Beast. The parson was trudging stolidly towards Swamp's End when he encountered the breathless Plain Tom Hitch and was informed of the perilous situation of Billy the Beast. An hour later, the big minister broke wrathfully into the bar of the Red Elephant. Billy the Beast was drunk. Billy the Beast was very drunk. And—as always at this stage of his carouse—he was engaged in a theological controversy, chiefly with himself. "You take Sammy Sink," he was arguing, "an' *he* was converted. Converted in a minute. Yes, sir. Never wanted another drink.

Not Sammy Sink." It was to the case of Sammy Sink—whom nobody knew—that Billy the Beast invariably referred to clinch his argument. Conversion was Billy the Beast's mania in intoxication. "I want ye t' know, boys," he ran on, "that Almighty God *kin* convert a man whenever He wants t'. Yes, sir. He don't do it any too dashed often t' suit *me;* but He kin do it when He wants t'. An' He done it t' Sammy Sink. Why!" he exclaimed, "Almighty God could convert *me* if He tried." Whether or not Billy had already been robbed of his wages by pickpockets or bartenders, John Fairmeadow could not tell, as he advanced to the bar. If so—if the thing had already been accomplished—Billy's hope of going home was blasted. There would be nothing for Billy to do but go back to the woods until he had accumulated another store.

Fairmeadow laid a rough hand on Billy's shoulder. "Where's your money?" he demanded.

"Ah, shucks, parson!" Billy pleaded, "lea' me alone."

"Where's your money?"

"I'm jus' havin' a little fun."

"Where's your money?"

"Ain't got no money."

It was true.

"Blowed my stake," said Billy the Beast.

Charlie the Infidel—himself a little flushed—interrupted. "Look here, parson!" said he; "what you buttin' in here for, anyhow?"

"Me?" the parson flashed, in a rage.

"Yes—you! This ain't no place for a parson."

Fairmeadow stared.

"What you want t' butt in *here* for?"

"Charlie," said Fairmeadow, going a little pale, "*this is my job!*"

"Well," the bartender fumed, "we don't need no parson here t'-night."

"*What!*" Fairmeadow roared.

Charlie the Infidel hesitated not at all. He came over the bar. Fairmeadow leaped away and stood waiting. He smiled a little. The thing was to his taste. Charlie's assault was immediate. He struck at the minister. And he was a big man—a bigger man than Fairmeadow. Had the blow been effective, Fairmeadow would not only have measured his length on the floor, but would then and there have closed a useful career at Swamp's End, where nobody had much regard for a beaten man. Of this, Fairmeadow was acutely aware. He saw to it that the bartender's blow failed. It was a simple matter. Fairmeadow bobbed his head—and the blow passed over. This chanced to be an art in which the minister had in a mild way been trained. He laughed a little. Charlie returned to the assault in a fury. Again Fairmeadow avoided him. And again Fairmeadow seemed to be a little bit amused. The crowd—a group of lumber-jacks and their human parasites—attended in amazement. What manner of parson was this? The manner of preacher was known to them; and the manner of fighting man was presently disclosed. Charlie the Infidel came at him again. Again Fairmeadow evaded with a smile. He would not strike his antagonist until the watchers had been persuaded that the antagonist could not strike him. But the fight must have an end; and that end must be decisive, Fairmeadow knew, lest the fight have to be fought all over again. And when Charlie the Infidel came again Fairmeadow tapped him on the chest—a tap of such amazing weight, however, that the bartender reeled.

"Now, boys," said Fairmeadow, looking about, completely in possession of his temper, even his good humour, "I'll have to put him out."

Charlie the Infidel rushed. Fairmeadow leaped aside—stepped forward—three swift little steps—and struck. Charlie the Infidel went down. It had been necessary. It had not only been necessary, perhaps, but a providential opportunity, unprovoked, to display all those arts of self-protection of which Fairmeadow was possessed. Perhaps—if one were to look into the matter with care—it was all as wise and helpful to Fairmeadow's parishioners as a sermon might have been. But John Fairmeadow was distressed when he helped the dazed Infidel to his feet; and his distress was deep and real.

"I'm sorry, old man," said he.

"That's all right, parson," Charlie returned; "you got me fair enough."

Fairmeadow was silent.

"That's *all right!*" Charlie repeated. "Don't you worry no more about that."

"It needn't occur again," said Fairmeadow.

"No," Charlie returned, positively; "it *won't!*"

"I'm glad," said Fairmeadow, devoutly. "You see, Charlie," he began, in disgust, "your business here of bartending is such a detestable ——"

"Never mind that," Charlie broke in; "we talked that t' death long ago."

"But God help you, it *is* detestable!"

"Boys," said the Infidel to the gaping crowd of woodsmen and small gamblers, "what'll ye have? The drinks is certainly on *me*."

Billy the Beast had vanished.

The Beast had vanished. Nor could Fairmeadow find him again that night. What matter, after all? Billy the Beast could not have "gone home." They had robbed him of his wages long before John Fairmeadow's arrival in the bar of the Red Elephant. Three days later Fairmeadow found him—and Fairmeadow's search had been diligent—in the snake-room of the Café of Egyptian Delights, where he had been thrown, sick and utterly penniless—such was the purpose of the snake-rooms of the lumber-town saloons—when there was no more to be got out of him and he could borrow no more. Billy was in a stupor of intoxication, but presently revived a little, and turned very sick.

"That you, parson?" he asked.

"Yes, Billy."

"A' right."

"Feel a little better, now?"

"Uh-huh."

Fairmeadow eased the man's head on the floor of the foul place.

"Guess I better not go home," Billy muttered. "Not this time."

"No," said the parson; "not this time."

"Nex' time," said Billy.

"Yes," said the parson; "next time—next time, surely, God help you!"

Billy the Beast tried again and again to "go home." "So long, boys!" he continued to say, when he set out for Swamp's End, with his wages in his pocket. "So long, boys! I'm goin' home. Mother's sent fer me. The ol' lady's pretty well on in years, now. An' I jus' *got* t' go." Again and again the thing happened;

but there came a last time—in the end it came —when Billy the Beast set out for Swamp's End, bound home.

In all this time John Fairmeadow was a busy man. None more industrious: none whose work lay nearer or needed doing more. And there was something added to the most that he could accomplish. John Fairmeadow was not the "real thing" yet. He was only a lay preacher, after all. The boys believed in him, of course: the boys would listen to no criticism of him. But the boys wanted the "real thing." And with this reasonable wish John Fairmeadow was in sympathy. As Fairmeadow told Pale Peter in the beginning, he had arranged all that with the Superior Body of his Church. Ordination would come in due course. Fairmeadow would be an accredited minister by and by. The Superior Body had required an examination in systematic theology, Old Testament history, how to compose a sermon, and the like; but that was all. Those rare hours which John Fairmeadow had for himself he devoted to the acquirement of this knowledge. It was a much interrupted pursuit of knowledge: there was so much for a parson to do in the barrooms of Swamp's End after night—so many sudden calls upon the wisdom and muscle of the minister—that there was little enough time for learning of the text-books about the origin of sin and the nature of God. But John Fairmeadow persevered. He was not much interested, to be sure, in the origin of sin, as expounded in the big, black text-book; and he had his own sources of information (not metaphysical) concerning the nature of God. But he persevered, for the boys' sake, determined to make the best of the very hard job; and he looked forward to the Superior Body's examination with a trepidation so genuine and extreme that it occasionally made him laugh.

And —

"If the boys want an ordained minister in these camps," John Fairmeadow determined, "they're going to *have* one!"

XIV

PALE PETER'S DONALD

IT was raining: an interminable drizzle, occasionally rising, with a rush of wind from the gray sky, to a noisy downpour. Swamp's End—a dreary puddle of mud in wet weather—was dripping and out of sorts. In Charlie the Infidel's living quarters beyond the bar at the Red Elephant, Mrs. Charlie the Infidel, bored to death by the adventures of the lord and lady's-maid of her paper-backed novel, was out of sorts with all of Swamp's End, and yawned until the poor lady's jaws fairly cracked; and up-stairs, in Pale Peter's rooms, Pale Peter's Donald, too, was out of sorts, dawdling over the lessons John Fairmeadow had set him, pausing, now and again, to stare vacantly into the rainy weather, and sighing far more than a lad of blithe age and rosy health should have good occasion to sigh. Pale Peter's Bruiser, restless under a chair in the bar, was obviously out of sorts; and Pale Peter himself, reposing in an easy chair in the little office at the end of the bar, his feet on the desk, a cigar in his listless hand, gazing blankly through the window into the muddy street, was considerably more out of sorts than anybody connected with his thriving establishment. Pale

Peter was very much out of sorts, indeed: Pale Peter could not recall—and while he stared into the rain he had searched his experience—Pale Peter could not recall another mood of such footless black melancholy. It could not be the bar. There was no trouble in the bar. The Bottle River and Cant-hook wagons had driven up, gathered each its load of stupefied sots, and staggered off again. And it was not the weather. Pale Peter was dry, clean, warm and sheltered. It was surely not the weather. Pale Peter wondered what Donnie was doing; and then, with a quick little frown, he wondered what was the matter with the boy, and when he would leave off sighing, and why he sighed at all, and why the deuce he kept ogling his own father with grave and pained regard. Pale Peter was decidedly out of sorts.

The only man who wasn't out of sorts at Swamp's End, it seemed—and the only man who was abroad in the rain—was John Fairmeadow, who came whistling down the street towards the Red Elephant—and was presently smiling broadly from Pale Peter's other easy chair, already booted for the trail.

"Jack," Pale Peter wanted to know, "what the deuce do you do it for?"

"Do what?"

"Well, for example," Pale Peter asked, "where are you going now?"

"Kettle Stream, Peter."

"Kettle Stream!" Pale Peter exclaimed, in amazement. "On a day like *this?*"

"You see," Fairmeadow explained, apologetically, "I promised the boys I'd be out to-night to preach a little sermon."

"What in thunder do you do it for?"

"Keep my word?"

"No, no! I mean the whole thing. Why is it that you spend your time in this God-forsaken mud-hole mollycoddling the swine of these woods?"

Fairmeadow laughed.

"It's dirty work for a man like you," Peter added, in disgust.

"What do *you* do it for?" Fairmeadow sharply demanded.

"Me!"

"You."

"Do what?"

"Why is it," Fairmeadow accused, "that you spend your time in this God-forsaken mud-hole sending the souls of these poor fellows to damnation? It's dirty work, Peter," he added, "for a man like you."

Peter laughed.

"I can't understand," Fairmeadow went on, "why it is that you should turn yourself into the detestable beast that you ——"

"Money, Jack."

Fairmeadow sneered.

"I have a son, Jack," said Peter, quietly.

"Yes," Fairmeadow gravely replied; "you have a son."

"Jack," Pale Peter confided, there being some quality in the melancholy gray weather to induce confidences, "I love my son. Since his mother died—she didn't die here, Jack—she knew nothing of this, thank God!—since his mother died, I haven't cared much for anything else in the world. And I—I—want the boy to make good with his life. I tell you, Jack, my heart is set on his making good!"

"Poor boy!" Fairmeadow sighed.

Pale Peter started. "What do you say that for?" he asked, bewildered.

"Poor little fellow!" Fairmeadow repeated.

There was a squall of rain in the bleak day beyond the great window. It came in a rush from the low gray sky and drummed on the panes.

"For God's sake, Jack," Pale Peter demanded, leaning forward in agitation, "why do you call him that?"

"I think," Fairmeadow replied, "that he loves you very much."

"Yes, yes; of course! But ——"

"That's why."

"I understand, of course, that he loves me," Pale Peter began, still bewildered; "but, you see, Jack ——"

"That's why," Fairmeadow repeated.

Pale Peter's gray face, fixed and emotionless of habit, was now in a frown of perturbation and concern. The man shifted uneasily in his chair. He puffed noisily at his cigar, for a moment, and then, fallen into a troubled muse, he stared out of the window, seeing nothing of the driving rain, nothing of the drear, darkening sky, closing in upon the Red Elephant, but somehow, in his drawn face, reflecting the deepening melancholy of the day. "Jack," said he, presently, "you and I ought to get this thing straight. I want you to understand. You see, old man, I—I—love my son. Having no son of your own, Jack, you don't know, of course, just what this means. But the plain fact is, Jack, that there isn't anything else in the world that I care very much about. I don't care about myself, Jack. Not a bit—not a single bit! All I care about is—Donnie. That may sound almighty queer to you, old man; but it's true, and if you had a son of your own, you'd understand it. It isn't sentimental, you know: it's just a natural pride and love. If you were a father yourself, Jack—why—you'd understand." Pale Peter paused. "And now, old man," he went on, "I'm going to tell you a little about myself." Pale Peter—gray Pale Peter of the Red Elephant at Swamp's End—Pale Peter of the thin gray lips, of the cold gray eyes, the white hands and the correctly tailored, smart, brushed and pressed attire—Pale Peter looked once into the sympathetic eyes of the big minister, and, content with the feeling he found, struck a match, applied it to the end of his cigar, puffed, leaned back in his leather-covered chair, blew a cloud of fragrant smoke towards the red curtains of the door to the bar, and went on. "Jack," said he, "I want my boy to make good. What I want is that he shall make good with his life. What I want—and if I were a praying man it is what I should pray for—what I want is just that he shall *make good* with his life."

"What do you mean?"

"That he shall be a man—a decent Man."

"I see."

"I didn't have a very good time, Jack," Pale Peter went on, "when I was a boy—like Donnie. My father was in this business. Not successfully, Jack. And not here. It was in the East—a big city—and a mean, poverty-stricken quarter of the town. And I tell you, old man, I can't forget it! It was a harsh life for a little boy to live. It was bitter cruel. And when I got out of school, Jack, and had to make my own way through college, I made up my mind, let the text-books talk as they liked, that if ever I had a little boy of my own to look after, he shouldn't suffer what I had suffered. It seemed to me to be a matter of money. That's all. Just money. And I think so, now. It's money—just money." Pale Peter paused again. Fairmeadow said nothing—never a word of protest. "When Donnie came, Jack," Pale Peter went on, "and when Donnie's mother died, it seemed to me that I could do better by the boy, by doing something like this, than by keeping on in what you might call a self-respecting employment, but what was, in point of fact, a very poorly paid one. I knew this business, Jack, and I knew, because I had heard the talk of it, the opportunity there was out here in the lumber-woods. And so I came out here, when Donnie's mother died, to make good for Donnie; and I *have* made good, and I'll be rich, soon, and Donnie and I will go East and forget how the money was made. He's only a little fellow, Jack. He'll forget; surely, he won't remember. And he won't have to go through what I went through as a boy. He'll have a chance—a fair chance to make a man of himself; and that's all I want, Jack—just to provide a fair chance for little Donnie to make a man of himself."

"I see," said Fairmeadow.

"What have you been doing, Jack?"

"Nothing."

"Nothing at all?"

"Not much."

"What have you done?"

"Well, of course," Fairmeadow explained, "I'm playing the game with you, as I understand what you meant when first we talked together. I'm teaching Donnie, for example, to read; and I'm ——"

"Good!" Pale Peter broke in. "Of course, I know that. But ——"

"Donnie goes with me everywhere he cares to go."

"That's good! Of course, I know that. And you display, I know, a fine manhood for him to emulate. I'm glad you've come, Jack, and I'm more than glad you've stayed."

"I'm teaching him something about God."

"Good! That's playing the game, Jack."

"Yes; that's playing the game. But, Peter, as far as you are concerned, the game is going to ——"

"I'm almighty glad you're teaching him about God."

"I don't know very much about God, of course," Fairmeadow apologized; "but what I do know—what I have learned from reasonable sources and found out for myself—I'm teaching, as best I can, in a very quiet way, to ——"

"That's good!" Pale Peter interrupted. "I'm glad of it!"

"There's nothing else, I think."

"Has he—has he said anything about—me?"

"Nothing."

"Nothing"—and Pale Peter jerked his gray head towards the red-curtained door to the bar—"about this?"

"Not yet."

"That's good," said Pale Peter. "He's too young, yet, to understand."

"This business of Billy the Beast," said Fairmeadow, at a venture, "is not much to the boy's taste."

"Oh, well, pshaw!" Pale Peter ejaculated. "Billy the Beast must be let alone. If Donnie wants him to go home, he can go. I'll attend to that, Jack. I'll see to it that nobody ——"

"Not at all!" Fairmeadow interrupted.

"No?"

"Not at all! If Billy the Beast goes home, he must go of his own notion, and by his own strength, helped out by God Almighty, and by nobody else."

"That's all right, Jack."

Fairmeadow looked Pale Peter over in a muse. "Peter!" said he.

"Jack?"

"Notwithstanding all that you have told me, I should like to say something."

"Go ahead, Jack."

"I *have* to say it, Peter."

"That's all right, Jack. Go right ahead. Say anything you like."

"You are a damned rascal!"

Pale Peter sighed. "That's all right, Jack," he began. "Of course, I know your point of view; but ——"

Donnie came in.

"Hello, Jack!" said the boy. "I didn't know you were here."

"Hello, boy!"

"Hello, kid!" said Pale Peter.

"Hello, pop!"

"What is it, Donnie?"

"Nothing, sir. I just came down for a minute —to see—what you were doing."

The boy advanced, then, towards John Fairmeadow's chair; but as though bethinking himself, all at once, he turned, with a little flush, and moved towards his father, but without at all looking in the man's anxious gray eyes. Indeed, he seemed to avoid his father's glance; but he settled himself on his father's knee, without any sign of reluctance, and began to play with the rings on his father's long white fingers, listening absently, the while, to the inconsequent chatter which the two men had taken up upon his entrance. He was not in Pale Peter's image; he was obviously his mother's son—a brown-eyed youngster, of a dreaming way, oversensitive, perhaps, and given to moods. Pale Peter had him dressed out in the late fashion of the East; he was quite as well tailored, quite as well groomed, quite as good-mannered, quite as faultless as to linen, as Pale Peter himself, and his accent was as soft and agreeable. He was restless on his father's knee. It seemed to Fairmeadow, who watched this play of feeling with acute anxiety, that the lad was shamefaced and troubled in his father's company. But Fairmeadow could not make sure; and he hoped, for Pale Peter's sake, that his doubtful inference was altogether mistaken. The boy did not stay long in the little office; he sighed, presently, and went away, to proceed with his lessons, said he, so that he might not make himself ashamed when John Fairmeadow should get back from preaching the little sermon to the boys on Kettle Stream.

When Donald had gone, Pale Peter turned anxiously to Fairmeadow. "He's all right, isn't he?" he asked. "He looks well, doesn't he?"

"Quite hearty," Fairmeadow laughed.

"He's been so blue, of late," the saloon-keeper went on, doubtfully, "that I get frightened, sometimes. I'm glad you think he's all right, Jack. I—I—shouldn't like to lose him. You don't think, do you, Jack, that I'm likely to lose him, out here?"

"Not in the way you mean."

"What do you mean by that, Jack?"

"The boy's in good health."

Pale Peter was relieved. "I'm glad you think so," said he. "I don't want to lose him, Jack.

He's all I got. My God, I don't want to lose him!"

Fairmeadow rose to take the trail for Kettle Stream.

"Jack," said Pale Peter, returning to the first question, "what do you do it for?"

"I want to."

"It looks like a mean job to me."

"It's a *man's* job! And I *like* it."

"Yes; but—but—what do you do it for?"

"Once, Peter," Fairmeadow answered, gravely, "I had my own fingers burned."

"You!"

"I was pretty well scorched, Peter."

Pale Peter stared. "You don't look it, Jack," said he, at last.

"No," Fairmeadow replied; "not now."

Peter whistled his amazement. "You!" he ejaculated. "Well, well! And that's why! I understand. I understand—now. But you're up against it, Jack. You're up against far more than you can overcome. The liquor men are not going to let you do anything big out here. They're not going to let you interfere very much with business, Jack. You can pick a few river-pigs and filthy lumber-jacks out of the fire, of course; and you can sober a lot of them up, when they need it, and you can save some of them a little money, and you can teach them all to sing hymns. But you're not going to be allowed to do very much more. You're up against it, Jack. You're up against the whole system. You can't put a stop to anything. You can go just so far and no farther. Raw Jack Flack of Big Rapids can put a stop to all the good you're trying to do. The police are with us; the judges are with us; the district attorney is with us: so what's the use? The attorney-general won't listen to you. You can't do anything. You know that a lumber-jack hasn't the ghost of a show in the settlements. He can be filled up and robbed just whenever a saloon-keeper wants to fill him up and rob him. Not a magistrate in seven counties will lift a finger to help him. What's the use, Jack? What's the use? Why don't you go somewhere where your work will count? What do you waste yourself here for?"

"My work is counting."

"Oh, pshaw!"

"It is, Peter."

"One of these days," Pale Peter scoffed, "you'll get Billy the Beast through Swamp's End with his wages in his pocket; and you'll call that a day's work!"

"By Jove!" Fairmeadow laughed, grimly, "it would *be* a day's work."

"What would it matter?"

"A good deal—to me and to Donnie. And

a great deal more to Billy the Beast and—to his mother."

Pale Peter sighed.

"Peter," said Fairmeadow, lifting his pack to his shoulder, "I carry the standard of righteousness in these woods. Doubtless I'm a very wretched sort of man to lift a flag like that. But I'm the only man to do it, Peter, and I'm going to keep on. Perhaps I'm nothing more than a protest. But I propose to keep right on interposing my life between these poor fellows and their destruction. There are boys in the camps—there are hundreds of mother's sons there—without a hand to help them or a voice to cry out against their ruination. I interpose, Peter—I interpose!" Fairmeadow squared his shoulders and threw back his fine head. "I like it!" he cried. "I'm glad I'm alive. I'm glad that I trod the path I did. I'm glad because it has brought me to this place and to this work in the world. I interpose, Peter—I interpose!"

With that he went out.

Pale Peter sat brooding in the gray light. His mood had not been relieved by the minister's gallant purpose and way. Rather, it had been deepened. Down came the rain: now in a sweeping, passionate rush from the drear sky, now in a disheartening drizzle. Pale Peter brooded darkly. It was true that he loved his son. It was true that his hope lay altogether in the boy. It was true, too, that the design of all his dealings at Swamp's End was to provide a sure and untroubled future for the son he loved. And Donald, he fancied, was yet young; the boy would not be scarred by what went on about him—and he would forget. Why not, at any rate, let him know a little about life? Why not disclose to him all that he should avoid in life?—the way of the wicked and the wages of sin. The boy was well. Pshaw! the boy was in rosy health. There was no danger; neither body nor soul was in peril. John Fairmeadow would look out for his soul. Pale Peter would look out for his body. There was no good cause for alarm—not yet. And it would not be long, now, before the boy's future could be made secure. Another year or two; no more than that. As for the strange mood by which he was now possessed —

Donnie came in again.

"Hello, kid!"

"Hello, pop!"

"What's the matter, boy?"

"Nothing."

"Nothing?"

"Nothing."

Pale Peter's frown was anxious when he took the boy on his knee.

XV

FIST PLAY

IT will be observed that Fairmeadow had by this time shaken himself into place at Swamp's End. Perhaps the fashioning circumstances of his profession had shaken him into place: at any rate, he was established—an accepted institution in a hundred square miles of forest. "I'm here to preach and practice the Gospel of Jesus Christ," said he; "and I'm on the job!" He liked the job: he liked the preaching less, perhaps, than the vigorous practice of righteousness in which he was accustomed to indulge. He liked the trails—he liked the great pines in the reaches of the forest—he liked the wind and snow of winter—he liked the roar of the bunk-house fires. Moreover, he liked his rough parishioners. The slight attraction to which he had confessed to Gingerbread Jenkins upon the occasion of his arrival at Swamp's End had grown into genuine affection. Lumberjacks, river-pigs, saloon-keepers, and all: whatever their sins, John Fairmeadow liked 'em, and was heartily liked in return. But he had no church: he had no fixed habitation, indeed—no more than the bare little room over the Mother-

Used-To-Make-It Restaurant at Swamp's End—and he had no possessions that he could not carry in the pack on his back.

It was his custom to go from bunk-house to bunk-house through all his parish—to eat in the cook-houses and to sleep where he could. And he tramped the logging-roads upon his business whatever the weather: twenty miles in a blizzard at thirty below did not daunt him. He did much more than preach: he scolded the boys, he besought them, he pleaded with them, he knocked them down—and he wrote letters for them—and he yarned with them—and he looked after them when they fell ill—and he buried them when they died—serving them, at all times, indeed, like a minister of the old school. Queer places for sermons, perhaps, these long, low, stifling bunk-houses: but sufficient to the need of John Fairmeadow and the lusty fellows who listened—the lusty fellows who sang, too, "Jesus, Lover of My Soul" with the most hearty gusto in the world, and afterwards most profanely maintained that it was damned good sport.

"Sing her again!" a lumber-jack once shouted from his bunk.

They sang it again.

"Why the hell," the delighted lumber-jack demanded, "don't they have nice toons like that in the shows?"

It had not always been easy sailing. But the big, wise, earnest, kindly man—wise with his strength and wise with his comfort and blame—had won his way. Not everywhere, perhaps: not, for example, in the remoter camps of his parish, where only his name was known. He came, once—it was falling night of a blustering winter's day—to a far camp of the Logosh Reservation. A mean camp, this: a dirty bunk-house and a frowzy crew.

"Wouldn't mind, would you," said he, to the boss, "if I preached a little sermon to the boys to-night?"

"If ye done *what?*"

"If I preached a little sermon to the boys," Fairmeadow repeated, mildly.

"What for?"

"Well," Fairmeadow gently drawled, "that's my business."

"Hell of a business," the boss observed, "for a big man like you."

Fairmeadow sighed.

"You might make a livin'," the boss went on looking Fairmeadow over, "as a fightin' man."

"I do a little of that, too," said Fairmeadow.

"You can fight just as much as you've the mind to in this camp," the boss returned; "but we don't allow no preachin'."

"No?"

"Not!"

"It happens, my friend," said Fairmeadow, "that I have a pass in my pocket. It is signed by your employer."

"You couldn't preach in this camp," said the boss, promptly, "if you had a pass from God Almighty."

"No?"

"Not!"

Fairmeadow sighed. He pondered for a moment. His brow was all wrinkled with indecision. He sighed again. All this time the boss watched him in faint amusement. Fairmeadow, however, seemed not to observe the amusement. He was deep, it seemed, in indecision. Presently, however, he looked up. He measured the boss with a calculating eye. The boss measured him—with a calculating eye, also. Fairmeadow smiled. He laid off his pack, whistling pleasantly the while. The whistling ceased. He began to hum an evangelical hymn—in a way the most preoccupied—very softly and very devoutly—as though no disturbance whatsoever impended. It was a gentle hymn,

"Sweet hour of prayer,
Sweet hour of prayer ——"

and Fairmeadow seemed to like the rhythm of it. Presently, he addressed himself to some serious intention, and laid off his mackinaw, which he deposited carefully on his pack. His coat followed. He rolled up his sleeves. Then—and in the way of gentle regret—he fell into an attitude so precisely professional—the profession being that of a fighting man—that the boss started.

"I think," said Fairmeadow, beginning a cautious advance, "that I'll preach."

"I reckon you will," said the boss.

There was no fight.

After supper, Fairmeadow borrowed an empty barrel from the cook, and gravely rolled it into the bunk-house. This was the pulpit: a barrel was always Fairmeadow's pulpit. And an excellent pulpit it was, you may believe! It served John Fairmeadow's purpose perfectly. John Fairmeadow had rather have a barrel for a pulpit—provided the head did not give way before the fury of his discourse—than any other sort of pulpit in the world. Fairmeadow now covered the barrel with a gray blanket, which he had borrowed from a teamster—such a blanket as poor Gray Billy Batch had lain under upon the occasion of his obsequies at Swamp's End. The transformation of the bunk-house into a church was now complete. There was nothing left to desire. Fairmeadow distributed the hymn-books, which he had carried in his pack, and advised the congregation to trim the lanterns, which the congregation at once proceeded to do. When he had requested the congregation not to smoke in church, Fairmeadow went gravely into the pulpit and took off his coat. He knelt, for a moment, in prayer—nobody so punctilious as John Fairmeadow in respect to the forms—whereupon he got up, pulled a little copy of the Scriptures from his hip-pocket, loosened the collar of his brown flannel shirt, looked the congregation over, picked up a hymn-book from the gray blanket, turned up the lantern hanging overhead, and announced the hymn.

"Number sixty-three, boys," said he.

It was a curious church and a curious congregation; but it *was* a church—Fairmeadow had insisted upon its being a church—and it was an interested congregation. It was blowing outside in the forest: the wind went swishing past the log cabin—a wind with snow, wildly blowing. But it was hot and stifling within. There was a roaring fire in the big stove in the middle of the long, narrow room. The lumber-jacks were grouped about it, sprawling comfortably on the fire-wood, hymn-books in hand. Others sat on the benches which ran along each side of the room below the bunks. Others, still, lay flat in the bunks, their frowzy heads protruding in curiosity. There were two rows of bunks, one on each side; and each row was a "double-decker"

—head to the wall and foot towards the middle of the room. Mackinaws, woolen socks and shirts, mittens, great boots, hung from the racks above the beds, steaming in the heat. All this was in the light of many lanterns—light and shadow of these dim-burning, flickering lamps. It was a congregation of all ages of men, from fresh, rosy youngsters, with a first beard showing, to old gray-heads, of fifty years' standing in the lumber-woods. Not one of them all, perhaps—not even the youngest lad among them—but knew the saloons of Swamp's End. The debauch was the traditional diversion with them, as it had been when Gingerbread Jenkins was a boy; it was the theme of all the brave stories to which the youngsters listened when the day's work was done.

When the hymn was sung—and when Fairmeadow had prayed—and when they had sung once more—Fairmeadow announced his text, according to his custom.

"Boys," he began, directly, "this little passage from ——"

In the other end of the long room somebody began to grind an axe.

"Boys," Fairmeadow repeated, "this little ——"

The grinding went on.

"This little passage ——"

There was a titter.

"Boys," Fairmeadow began again, "this passage ——"

The grinding continued.

"I say, back there!" Fairmeadow called, coming abruptly out of his sermon, "would you mind grinding that axe at another time?"

At once the grinding ceased.

"This little passage," Fairmeadow began, "from the ——"

There was more grinding.

"Passage from the ——"

The congregation tittered.

"If you boys back there wouldn't mind grinding that axe at another time," Fairmeadow called, "we'd all be much obliged."

At once the grinding ceased.

"Thank you," said the preacher.

Fairmeadow was on the point of opening his lips to go on with the preaching when the wheel began to turn and the axe-blade to screech its complaint. "Some of the boys, here," he said, instead, in a very mild way, "want to hear me preach. Isn't that so, boys?" There was instant assent. It was evidently so. A good many of the boys—almost every one of the boys—wanted to hear John Fairmeadow preach; and they said so. "All right," said Fairmeadow, "I'll preach. But I can't very well preach," he went on, addressing the shadowy rear of the room, "if you boys back there keep on grinding that axe."

There was a mocking whistle from the shadow in the rear.

"I *say*," said Fairmeadow, "that I can't preach if anybody grinds an axe."

At once the grinding was begun.

"Friend, back there!" Fairmeadow called, in pathetic protest, "can't you oblige the boys by doing that at another time?"

Apparently not.

"No?" Fairmeadow grieved.

Again the mocking whistle.

"Well," Fairmeadow complained, "I've *got* to preach!" Fairmeadow sighed as he walked slowly to the rear of the room. There was a big man—the big boss whom Fairmeadow had earlier encountered—at work over the grindstone. Fairmeadow laid a hand on his shoulder in a way not easily misunderstood. "My friend," he began, softly, "if you ——"

The boss struck at him.

"Keep back, boys!" an old Irishman screamed, catching up a peavy-pole. "Give the parson a show! Keep out o' this or I'll brain ye!"

Fairmeadow caught his big opponent about the waist—flung him against the door (the preacher was wisely no man for half measures)—caught him on the rebound—put him head foremost in a barrel of water and absent-mindedly held him there until the old Irishman asked, softly, "Say, parson, ye ain't goin' t' *drown* him, are ye?" It was all over in a flash. "I *beg* your pardon!" said Fairmeadow, contritely, to his antagonist, now lying, dripping and gasping, on the bunk-house floor, while the bunk-house broke into a tumult of jeering. "I *beg* your pardon!" Fairmeadow repeated. "You provoked me, you see; and I—I—I really *must* preach. You see," he added, apologetically, "that's my business." Then he went back to his pulpit, not ruffled at all, and proceeded with his sermon, to which the congregation listened with deep attention, and possibly to their profit. At any rate, the altercation forgotten, when Fairmeadow raised a dog-eared little hymn-book to the smoky light of the lantern overhead, and announced, "Boys, let's sing number fifty-six. *Jesus, lover of my soul, let me to Thy bosom fly.* You know the tune, boys. Everybody sing"—they sang heartily enough.

And the whipped boss was not thereafter Fairmeadow's enemy. Not at all! To the contrary: the big boss, who might have regarded an academic sermonizer with contempt, had nothing but respect for the parson who could thrash him. That he had been thrashed was beyond reasonable question; but, as it turned out, he was never content with the verdict, and would beg John Fairmeadow for another chance, which, however, John Fairmeadow never would allow him, good-humoured though he could be upon occasions. And so John Fairmeadow lived these days in the woods. It was tramp the logging-roads from camp to camp. It was a sermon every night—a word straight from his big heart—a message straight from an old-fashioned gospel; and it was three sermons of a Sunday, if three bunk-houses could be reached. His message went to all the men of the woods—to loggers and lumber-jacks: to road-monkeys, cookees, cooks, punk-hunters, wood-butchers, swampers and the what-nots of the camps. It was a straightforward message directed against evil. It was a big man's message to big men. There was no quibbling. There was no compromise. There were no doubts. John Fairmeadow was a Christian minister of the old school. "I have come to these woods," he used to say, "to preach the Gospel of Jesus Christ. That's all I preach. And, boys," he would add, "you've got to take it straight. There'll be no water in it." It was, indeed, an unwatered gospel. The preaching and practice of it made John Fairmeadow a beloved minister in every camp of his great parish.

Pale Peter's Donald often trotted the logging-roads and forest trails at the heels of the big minister. Fairmeadow was frankly glad to have the boy's earnest company. But Fairmeadow was not proselyting: as the boy's soul took its chances in Pale Peter's bar, just so must it take its chances in the bunk-houses when John Fairmeadow stood up to preach.

"Where you going, Jack?"

"Yellow-Tail, kid."

"May I go along?"

"Sure! Come on!"

Pale Peter never objected. The boy was away with the preacher for days together. And he liked it. There was little enough to do at Swamp's End; and there was always excitement afoot where John Fairmeadow went. Pale Peter's Donald listened to the preaching, observed its effect, became acquainted with the men in whom Fairmeadow was particularly interested, discussed means with the preacher; and he was presently in the way of criticizing the sermons with such boyish wisdom as he had, and of offering well-meaning boyish advice. This was inevitable: it was all a game, and Pale Peter's Donald, taking sides with John Fairmeadow, played it with interest—with precisely the same sort of interest that he would have followed the fortunes of a politician had John Fairmeadow been a politician on the stump. When it came to the business of preaching in the bunk-houses, Fairmeadow made no effort to save the lad's feelings. He preached: that was his business—less to expound than to denounce and expose. But Fairmeadow was at other times infinitely careful to let fall no word of contempt or blame for the boy's father. The matter of Pale Peter's occupation was tacitly ignored by the two. Fairmeadow perceived a tragedy of feeling approaching. A year, at most, he fancied, would bring the issue. Perhaps longer; but it must inevitably come.

"How's Donnie coming along?" Pale Peter would ask.

"Donnie's all right."

"Has he said anything about—about the business?"

"Not yet."

"Is he thinking about it very much, Jack?"

"Quite a bit."

"Getting sore on it, Jack?"

"I don't know."

"Getting sore on me, Jack?"

"Oh, no!"

"Well," said Pale Peter, "he's young yet. I can go along for a few years, I guess, before he'll understand."

Fairmeadow said nothing.

"Don't you think so, Jack?"

"It's none of my business, Peter," Fairmeadow replied.

In these days, too, Fairmeadow continued to fill his spare hours with the hurried pursuit of theological lore. If his parishioners were ever to be content—if he were ever completely to possess their respect—if he were ever to win his ordination—he must master a larger knowledge of the mechanism of salvation than he could now call his own. And so he patiently delved away. In this labour Pattie Batch was tremendously interested. John Fairmeadow had explained it all—examination, the laying on of hands, the dignity of the cloth, and the like. And Pattie Batch was presently more determined that John Fairmeadow should be decorated with "The Reverend" than even John Fairmeadow himself.

"How you gettin' on, Jack?" says Pattie Batch.

"Too busy, Pattie," says John Fairmeadow, "to trouble very much about original sin."

"You *better* trouble, my boy!"

"Why, Pattie?"

"Because there's nothin' too good for the boys."

XVI

THEOLOGICAL TRAINING

IT must unhappily be disclosed at this point that John Fairmeadow was not from the beginning the big, bubbling, rosy-cheeked fellow who had with fine faith and purpose uplifted engaged with Gingerbread Jenkins and God Almighty to minister to the lumber-jacks of Swamp's End and all the woods surrounding. There had been a lapse. If the tale is to be told with truth to justify the telling—if Fairmeadow's amazing appearance at Swamp's End is reasonably to be accounted for—if his subsequent extraordinary proceedings are to be explained—if he is to become in any degree a creature comprehensible to these latter days—there must be frank dealing with the facts in his case. There is no virtue, indeed, in mitigating the facts; nor would Fairmeadow himself—had he a word to say in the matter—sanction a course so pale and insignificant. In the first place, then, the Fairmeadow who had taken service at Swamp's End was that selfsame John Fairmeadow you have in mind. He was that veritable Fairmeadow whose jolly, frowzy countenance grinned so frequently from the sporting pages in the fall of the year: the Fairmeadow, indeed, whose fame in this respect, and whose convivial reputation, reckless pranks and sturdy good fellowship continue to this day in the traditions of the College, and are talked of, with affectionate indulgence, when good fellows get together at the Club in town. He was the John Fairmeadow, moreover, who vanished, all of a sudden, from the haunts of his kind, and who dropped from sight, without warning or word of his destination, and continued dropping, dropping, dropping, until he struck bottom and could fall no farther.

Bottom was the Bowery.

"I'm a little behind the game," Fairmeadow used to yawn, in those days.

This was from the park benches.

Seven months before his belligerent appearance at Swamp's End, in search of the worst town this side of hell—it being then a wet night in the fall of the year—Fairmeadow had been ejected from Solomon's Cellar, in the Mulberry Park neighbourhood, because he disgusted the ruined habitués of the place. Ejected is too mild a word with which to describe the operation: Fairmeadow had actually been kicked out. He was then—and he had for four years been—an inhabitant of the outcast drunkard's world. This was the city's deepest underworld. It was a world lower than vice; it was the underworld of vice itself—lower than the last depths to which a woman could fall. The common vices had there lost their savour. Wickedness was without salt. Nothing was left to indulge. There remained only a bleared, stupid, indecent thirst for alcohol. Dim, stifling lodging-houses, ill-lit cellar drinking-places, thieves' resorts, wet saloon-bars, back alleys, garbage pails, slop-shops, pawn-brokers' wickets, the shadowy arches of the Bridge, deserted stable yards, a multitude of wrecked men, dirt, rags, blasphemy, darkness: John Fairmeadow's world had been a fantastic and ghastly confusion of these things. The world was without love: it was besotted. Faces vanished: ragged forms shuffled out of sight for the last time. Nobody cared, nobody remembered: there was no love. John Fairmeadow had moved an outcast in these rat-holes and devious ways until the last haunt was closed to him.

"I'm a little behind the game," he used to yawn. "I wonder where I can get a drink."

It was only drink.

"Where can I get a drink?"

Fairmeadow was in other ways a clean soul.

There was the day's work of begging for drink; there was nothing more than that. Food? What does a man want of food? A crumb or two of free lunch: it is as much, in such circumstances, as a man's stomach will hold. What a man wants is another drink. John Fairmeadow had pursued another drink for seven years. He had never quite managed to catch up with it. But he had overhauled a good many, of course—of all sorts, too: very good ones in the beginning, he says, with a wry smile. The next, however, had kept . . . always . . . just a little bit ahead. Half an hour ahead, I fancy, when he panhandled the Bowery. There was always another beyond—a mirage of soul's ease. It is a labour to pursue the next drink forever, it seems. But exhaustion is stupid and numb. John Fairmeadow rested at times: he slept a little. You will observe that nothing could put an end to the pursuit—no sort of restraint, no sort of treatment in sanitariums, no sort of effort of which John Fairmeadow was even in the beginning capable. He tried, of course: for a long, long time he kept on trying. But he was helpless; and eventually he found his level on the Bowery, where many another broken-hearted fellow had gone before him. Fellows like John Fairmeadow, moreover: scores of gentlemen, born and bred, not to be distinguished, then, however, from the native wretches, born of drunken mothers to inevitable degradation.

It was this—in the end—that determined the residence of Almighty God and John Fairmeadow at Swamp's End.

John Fairmeadow was successful on the Bowery—successful enough to achieve the distinction of *delirium tremens* three times. He was a bit clever—with a cultivated intelligence and some grit of birth—and he had a little bag of appealing tricks. *The Recessional*, for example. It never failed him. It stirred the low saloons, somehow, wherever he declaimed it, however low they were. *The tumult and the shouting dies.* . . . There was *The Ride of Paul Revere*, too. A patriotic bit. It didn't move John Fairmeadow, though: not at the last. He had no occasion for patriotic enthusiasm. John Fairmeadow wanted another drink. . . . And a *Barrack Room Ballad* or two. *By the living God that made you, you're a better man than I am.* . . . Kipling fairly kept John Fairmeadow in drink. And John Fairmeadow was systematic. He kept a little pocket-map of the city—he had it at Swamp's End—and upon this with the stub of a pencil he traced his course from day to day. Beginning here in the morning; ending here—at this corner saloon—after midnight. You see, John Fairmeadow must not panhandle the same saloon twice in a week; they might kick him out. As a matter of fact they frequently did kick him out. Unfortunately, he would be so drunk at night, you see, that he couldn't put a mark on the map; and in the morning, with only a general idea of where he had concluded the previous day's pursuit of another drink, he would spin his yarn —he had a variety of pathetic stories, of course —where he had spun quite a different one the night before. John Fairmeadow didn't blame them for kicking him out. It was unpleasant, of course (not in the least humiliating)—but quite proper. And he couldn't resent it.

"A little behind the game."

Fairmeadow was ejected from Solomon's Cellar near midnight in wet weather of the fall of the year—thrust up the stair by Dutch Paddy and brutally kicked into the gutter. Solomon's Cellar was an all-night haunt of drunkards—but a step from Mulberry Park. One might sleep on the floor for the price of a glass of beer. Fairmeadow had slept on the floor for six months; but they had kicked him out, at last—and he was penniless, and very drunk. Of all the degraded men 'the cellar sheltered that night he was the most abominable. They would not tolerate John Fairmeadow: they kicked him out into the rain. Solomon's Cellar was the last refuge; there was no lower place. And Fairmeadow was sick. He was within a day or two, at most, of the alcoholic ward. He had begun to drink in the morning—to drink heavily. Of course, Fairmeadow must drink in the morning, always; he *must* drink in the morning. He was invariably awakened, in those days, at five o'clock in the morning, by thirst and horrible dreams. He was invariably penniless; but he must have a drink. There was no hedging: there was no dodging. Fairmeadow must make haste upon this business.

He would be shaking from head to foot of this need of liquor.

"Fer Gawd's sake," it was his custom to whine, "gimme a nickel fer a drink!"

He would be so obviously in desperate need that he would get his coin. He would have his drink; he would eagerly make haste for it—licking his dry, blue lips in expectation—his shuffle sometimes urged to a staggering run. He would have another drink, obtained in the same way: after which he might wait a bit. . . . But he had now been drinking himself drunk in the morning. It was indiscreet. He had known it. There was only one end. One restrains oneself, you know, until . . . The drunkard of Fairmeadow's low type lives continuously in deadly fear of *delirium tremens*. He goes to the verge. He withdraws—for a time. He is frightened; he dare go no further. And then, all at once, before he knows it, the poor wretch has stepped beyond, and . . . And John Fairmeadow of the Bowery had three times *known* the terrors of that delirium.

Fairmeadow had that morning determined to have a lodging-house cot for the night. It was a bitter morning—wet and cold, the wind blustering up from the Battery. Fairmeadow must have a bed, that night, he knew, to keep the life in his shivering body; but to have the bed he must save fifteen cents. He began at noon to deny himself. But restraint fretted and unnerved him. The objective of his day's beseeching for alms, of course, was stupor at night; how difficult for him, then, to withhold his gain—with a broken will! He panhandled ten cents at noon. A stroke of good luck! Very good. It was early—only noon. He could surely afford—another drink. And having had it, five cents remained. He stowed the coin away—this first saving for his bed. The drink inspired him: he was quite sure, now, that he would be able to add ten cents to the five before late night—that he would have the strength to beg it and the will to keep it. He *must* have a bed. It was the fall of the year, you see; and it was sleeting—a wet, killing wind blowing up from the sea. He must surely sleep under cover that night. But luck changed—and he wanted another drink. He had it, of course. He fought for an hour—he worked himself into a nervous sweat—to keep the coin in his pocket. But he could not keep it; and he had known all along that he could not.

Here was night coming down: a cold night—

wet and blowing. And John Fairmeadow must not sleep out; there must be no deserted truck for a bed—no park bench—no shelter of the Bridge—no draughty cellar—no huddled repose in the warm air ascending from some sidewalk grating. He must not sleep out. He *must* not: he did not dare. It was unseasonable weather. John Fairmeadow was not ready for it: he had no shirt—he had nothing, indeed, but coat and trousers and broken shoes. It was no night for a sick man—for a man as desperately ill as Fairmeadow—to sleep in the bitter air. But nobody heeded him. And here was despair. Still nobody heeded him. He begged in despair. He whined—he raged. He was wet, you see: it was late—it would presently be too late.

Too late!

And—

"M' friend," said a tipsy young fellow, "it's time you were in bed."

Fairmeadow found a quarter in the palm of his hand.

Well, here *was* luck! This wasn't so bad, to be sure! All at once Fairmeadow had his bed—there in his hand. And he had a surplus. Fifteen from twenty-five is ten. Ten cents is equal to two glasses of cheapest whiskey. Fairmeadow had one glass at once, of course; and presently he had another—and wanted the third.

But he must not have the third: there was no money to be spared for the third. He felt better, however—immensely better. He was mistaken, after all, it seemed; he was not going to be sick. He felt well—jolly well. So far as a bed was concerned—why—he did not *need* a bed. He could do without it at a pinch. And he *did* want—and need—another drink. He had it, of course; he could not help himself. And now he'd done it! He had broken his bed money. But having done this, why not have the other two drinks? What was the use of keeping ten cents over night? Why shouldn't he fortify himself? So he had the two drinks: he could not help it. And drunk, bewildered, shivering, he made his way to Solomon's Cellar, from which, when he had slept a little, they kicked him out, because he could not buy a glass of beer, because he was filthy, because he was ill-mouthed, because he was all quivering of nearness to the alcoholic ward.

Fairmeadow stumbled to a bench in Mulberry Park and there sat down in the rain.

"How long?" he wondered, stupidly.

It was a bitter night: a cold, sleety night, and late of it, with a killing wind driving up from the harbour. There was nobody about: a staggerer, only—two children bearing burdens beyond their strength—a shrewish woman in her cups. It was very late. The tenement hum and shuffle had long ago ceased.

Two men approached.

"Fer Gawd's sake," Fairmeadow besought them—it was the last time the whine passed his lips—"gimme a nickel fer a drink!"

Up-town, the children's prayers had all long ago been said: the cradles and cribs and little beds held each its burden of innocent flesh and sweet untroubled spirit. The polite world was still employed with its diversions—with love, laughter and young romance—with its aspirations and glittering hilarities. Of what happened, then, in Mulberry Park, however, John Fairmeadow has no very distinct recollection. He recalls that he reeled off towards the Bowery—that he had no money for a drink—that he wanted a bed-ticket—that he had been promised a bed-ticket—that he must get that bed-ticket or die—that he would surely get the bed-ticket if he kept on.

Jerry McAuley, who first conceived a mission of rescue to the exhausted underworld outcasts—it stands to this day in the evening shadow of Brooklyn Bridge in Water Street—was once agitated by that which thereafter remained to him a mysterious and profoundly amazing experience. It was a vision: he so called it—a dream, a trance, a vision. He was then, he used to say, not in the spirit of the Lord's day, as St. John of the Patmos revelation; he was at work—singing at his work. It was broad day. The sun shone. Except within the dreamer's consciousness there was of course no interruption of the sound and movement of the workaday world of which he was a part. Presently, however, he was in some way withdrawn. "My mind," he was used to explaining, bewildered for words, "became absorbed." A house was revealed: not a habitation, perhaps—a house of singular healing, from which a multitude of outcast men, having entered shuffling and ashamed, evil, filthy and in rags, emerged clean and exalted, and went each his way in the proper stature of a man. The vision was so real-appearing, so vivid and complete and significant, that McAuley fancied it a direct and divine revelation—an objective, at least, towards which his life must thereafter by divine direction tend. It could have been no more surely a moving reality of the dreamer's experience had a cloud of witnesses confirmed the fact and substance of it.

"I seemed to have a house in the Fourth ward," he used to say; "and there was a bath, and thousands of wretched men came to my house, and as they came in I washed them outside and the Lord washed them inside."

It was to this house that John Fairmeadow came. And that night—because of what happened in the house of Jerry McAuley's vision—Swamp's End became inevitable in John Fairmeadow's life. There was nothing else for it: John Fairmeadow must do precisely what presently he set out to do and eventually accomplished. The same miracle had been worked many times before in the house of McAuley's vision. It will be worked again—many, many times again. It will have the same effect in the lives of the men who have been made clean. It will impel them to go out—to go out into the wide world and to work therein—to work therein and to find peace in their own labour.

XVII

A FATHER FOR THE BABY

LITTLE Pattie Batch of Swamp's End in the lumber woods had from the very beginning intended never to be married; but with the advent of the baby—shortly thereafter, to be precise—she had changed her mind. It was not often that the positive little creature was disposed to weakness of this description; but she had all at once gone round about in the matter—with something of a jerk, indeed, and in surprise, like a robin turning its head—and she had now *fin'ly* decided. At first, however, when the baby was quite new, conceiving herself then to have been made altogether independent of a Mr. Pattie Batch by this amazing stroke of good luck, her ancient resolve against matrimony had grown all of a sudden fixed and gigantic. "Why," thinks she, in gleeful illumination—and as though shaking a defiant little fist in the face of the whole masculine world—"I—I—I don't *have* t', do I?" All very well: but presently the baby—well, of course, as everybody knows, a baby is everywhere a fashioning power. One never can tell what extraordinary changes a baby will work without so much as a word or a wink or a by-your-leave. And this baby—Pattie Batch's baby—began at once to revolutionize the adoring universe of Pattie Batch's little cabin at the edge of the big woods.

It was not Pattie Batch's very own baby; nor, of course, was it John Fairmeadow's baby: it was nobody's baby, at all, indeed in so far as the bedraggled lumber town of Swamp's End was aware. It was a foundling child, the gift of a winter's gale, brought to Pattie Batch, as may be recalled, in ease of her desolation and in advancement of its own fortunes, by John Fairmeadow, to whom it had mysteriously been bequeathed by a Shadow, now vanished, and never seen again. A welcome gift, to be sure! with Gray Billy Batch lost in the Rattle Water rapids in the drive of that year, and his tender daughter, left abandoned by his death, living alone and disconsolate in the log cabin at the edge of the big, black woods. Moreover, Pattie Batch had with her whole heart always wanted a baby; and now that she *had* a baby—a baby to polish, at the appointed intervals, from the crown of its head to the very most cunning of all created toes—a suitable and amazing infant in every respect—she was content with all the gifts of fortune.

When, next morning after the baby's astonishing arrival in the arms of John Fairmeadow, Pattie Batch bent in a glow of motherly adoration over the morsel in the basket —

"By ginger!" thinks she, "I'd jutht like t' thee the *Prethident o' the United Thtateth* athk *me* t' marry him."

The baby, of course, chuckled his approbation: whereupon Pattie Batch ferociously declared —

"*I'd* thquelch him!"

What of the untoward—and in what overwhelming measure—might instantly have happened to the poor gentleman, in the event of a declaration so presumptuous, heaven knows! An indication of the sorrowful catastrophe, however, in which a similar temerity would surely have involved the bold gentlemen of Swamp's End and Elegant Corners, was conveyed in Pattie Batch's mounting flush, in the flash of her scornful gray eyes, in her attitude of indignation, in her rosy little fists, and, most of all, perhaps, in the saucy—but infinitely bewitching—tilt of her dimpled chin. She would not at that moment have indulged the choicest flower of those parts—not with a perfectly satisfactory baby already in her possession.

Pattie Batch, having declared her loyalty to the baby, kissed his round cheek so softly that it might very well have been the caress of a dewdrop; and then she lifted him from the basket, and let him lie on her breast, where, if you will believe it, he just exactly fitted.

And—

"Huh!" she snorted, "I reckon *I'm* not athkin' no odds o' nobody."

Kings and emperors included!

Subsequently, however, motherly little Patience Batch, forever on the lookout for menacing circumstances, had all of a sudden discovered a lack in the baby's life. The need, indeed, was a swift and poignant revelation, and bitter, too, to the mother-taste; and like the untoward it remained thereafter in Pattie Batch's memory fixed in its scene. Pattie Batch recalls to this day that the sun was warmly shining, that a little breeze flowed over the pines and splashed into Gray Billy Batch's lazy clearing, where it rippled the fragrant grasses, and that the twitter and amorous call of spring were in the soft wind. It was Sunday: an interval of rest from the wash-wash-washing for the Bottle River camps in behalf of the baby's education. Pattie Batch had polished the baby—she had soaked, swabbed, scrubbed and scraped the baby—until the delicious morsel shone to a point of radiancy that might fairly have blinded the unaccustomed beholder; and the Blessed One, with that patience with love which distinguished and endeared it, had done nothing but smile, in bored toleration of all this motherly foolishness, from the moment of first unbuttoning to the happy time of buttoning up again.

Pattie Batch had the baby, now, in a sunlit patch of wild-flowers at the edge of the woods, which, presently, the lumber-jacks from the Bottle River camps, drifting from the dim forest trail to the clearing of Swamp's End for Sunday diversion, went passing. She heard laughter going by. It was no clean, boyish glee: it was a blasphemous outburst—by which, however, bred at Swamp's End, Pattie Batch would not have been greatly disturbed, had not the baby, catching ear of it, too, crowed in response.

It was the answering call—Pattie Batch fancied in a flash—of man to man.

"What you laughin' at?" she demanded.

The baby chuckled.

"Thtop it!" said Pattie Batch, severely.

By now the laughter of the men had gone down the trail; but the baby was still chuckling, with a little ear cocked for the vanishing hilarity.

"What you laughin' at?" Pattie whispered.

The baby stared in amused bewilderment.

"Thtop it!" Pattie commanded, scowling in a rage of fear. She caught the baby's dimpled hand—a rough grasp. "Don't laugh like *that!*" she pleaded.

Of course, the baby was infinitely astonished, and puckered his lips, in protest that whatever it was, *he* couldn't help it; and he would next instant have surprised the woods—his mouth was opening wide—had not the motherly little thing snatched him to herself.

"Never mind!" she crooned, contritely; "oh, never mind—never mind!"

Now, her heart in a flutter, Pattie Batch tried to interpret its agitation in definite terms; and presently she understood that the baby was a departing guest. It was the inevitable revelation. For a moment she stood at bay against the law of growth and change, amazed, pale, her rosy little fists clenched, her sweet red lips tight shut, her gray eyes pools of resentful fire. Love is no trifling, nor any free delight: it costs to love, and there is no easing of the obligation; but there abides in love the seed of its own salvation. Pattie Batch cried a little. It would malign her motherly heart to protest that she did nothing of the sort. But at least she had the decency to turn her face away from the baby—who had nothing to do, of course, with the law of growth, and was innocent of blame—and to manage a wry and glistening smile when she turned about again. She picked the baby up, then, from his bed and throne of flowers, and hugged him tight, and kissed him until he squirmed: whereupon she set him away, and stood off, regarding him in awe and willful accusation—and at once began to cry again, her heart yielding against her will.

John Fairmeadow was no longer a Bowery outcast. He was now a strapping, rosy, bubbling young fellow with a mighty zeal in behalf of a clean world; and he was in the days of this stressful time engaged with a broom of lusty faith upon the accumulations at Swamp's End and all the shanty towns of his big, green parish. It promised to be, he sometimes fancied, a permanent employment; but every morning, with a soul refreshed, he took off his coat, rolled up his sleeves, seized his broom and turned to once more, with a smile and a hearty will, his zeal not in the least discouraged by the magnitude of his task. He was a fine figure of a man, body and soul: he was known to Swamp's End as a man—a jolly, pugnacious, sensitive, prayerful fellow, with a pure purpose in the world and a fixed determination to achieve it. He had twinkling gray eyes, broad shoulders, a solid jaw, a straight back and a tender voice. It was not, however, with these charms—nor with those which have been omitted from this catalogue—that he impressed a better way upon his remote and rebellious parishioners; it was rather with a masterful intention, amazing devotion, a pair of dependable and intelligent fists, good fellowship, and generosity unfailing and just. A worthy fellow, indeed, from his soft utterance in prayer to his roar of laughter in the glow of the bunk-house fires!

Turning, now, from the Bottle River trail—he was bound out to the camps for Sunday preaching—he came upon Pattie Batch in tears at the edge of the woods. "Why, why, why!" he exclaimed aghast; "what's all this, child?"

"Nothin'," said Pattie Batch.

"Nothing!" John Fairmeadow protested.

"Well," Pattie Batch drawled, with a snuffle, "I'm jutht cryin' a li'l' bit."

"I should think you were," said John Fairmeadow. "There's a tear on the tip of your nose. But *why?*"

"Nothin'," Pattie Batch replied, indifferently.

"Nonsense!" John Fairmeadow declared.

"Nothin' *much*," said Pattie Batch.

John Fairmeadow inquiringly lifted Pattie Batch's little brown hand—whereupon Pattie Batch looked shyly away without very well knowing why—and demanded an explanation.

"It'th the baby," Pattie Batch admitted.

"Preposterous!" said John Fairmeadow, in disgust; "the baby isn't old enough to hurt *anybody's* feelings."

"The baby," Pattie Batch sighed, "hath got t' grow up."

"Glad of it!" cried John Fairmeadow. "I'm delighted!"

"Ithn't goin' t' *be* no baby no more!"

"Of course not!" said John Fairmeadow. "Have you nothing better to do than cry over that?"

"Well," Pattie Batch flashed, "I gueth I know my bithneth. *I'm* a mother," she declared, indignantly.

For the life of him, John Fairmeadow could discover no cause of grief in this fine prospect of growth. "Good heavens!" said he, "why shouldn't the baby grow up? Hasn't he the right to grow up if he wants to?"

Pattie Batch sat up with a jerk and stared at John Fairmeadow. "What say?" she gasped.

"Hasn't he the right to grow up?"

Pattie Batch pondered this. Presently she sighed and wiped her gray eyes. "Thith here baby dothn't belong t' me at all," she said, slowly, with the resignation inevitable in good mothers when the revelation is complete; "*he—belongth—to—himthelf!*"

A good thing to have over and done with!

Pattie Batch, resolute little heart! was not much given to weeping; and once having faced the inevitable—persuaded, now, too, that a soul is its own possession—she dried her tears completely and turned with rising courage to refashion her motherly strategy in the light of this new vision. There would be growth and change and going away. The baby would grow up: the baby would presently disappear in the boy, and the boy, like a flying shadow, would vanish in the man. Very well, what then? A revision of her love in its forms of expression, certainly. Pattie Batch, moreover, must instantly devise a plan. It began to rain, by and by; the lazy breeze, flowing over the pines, brought at nightfall a cold drizzle: and Pattie Batch, the baby stowed away in rosy sleep, drew up to the fire to think, in her father's way. Then and there, for the baby, she scattered her future to the winds of chance, emptied her heart of its abiding desires and overturned her little world. She sat for a long time, heart and mind washed clean of selfishness, dreaming heavily, in the glow, concerning the making of Men. How should one make a Man? What was demanded? What cleverness—what labour—what sacrifice? And the night had not far sped before wise little Pattie Batch came gravely to her momentous conclusion. Only a man, she determined, could make a Man.

John Fairmeadow tapped at the door, and, heartily bidden, entered for a moment from the rainy wind. "Well, well!" said he; "it's high time all little mothers were in bed. Come, come, my good woman! I just dropped in to pack you off."

"Thith here little mother," said Pattie Batch, with a saucy toss, "ith almighty bithy."

"Busy!" cried John Fairmeadow.

"Yep," Pattie Batch declared; "but she'th pretty near through."

John Fairmeadow demanded to know, of course, what the little mother had been bothering her pretty brains with.

"Nothin'," said Pattie Batch.

"None o' that!" John Fairmeadow protested.

"Anyhow," said Pattie Batch, "nothin' much."

"Out with it, young woman!"

"I th'pothe," Pattie Batch drawled, "that I got t' get married."

"Nonsense!" John Fairmeadow ejaculated.

"By ginger!" Pattie Batch burst out, with a slap of her knee, "I got t' get thith here baby a father."

"A *what?*"

"A father for thith here baby.'

John Fairmeadow jumped. "Patience Batch," said he, promptly, "how would I do?"

"Thertainly *not!*" said Pattie Batch.

"Why not?" John Fairmeadow wanted to know.

"Becauthe," drawled Pattie Batch.

"I'd be an excellent parent," John Fairmeadow declared. "I'd be an excellent parent for *any* baby. Why, I'd ——"

"John Fairmeadow!" Pattie exclaimed.

"What's the matter with me?" Fairmeadow demanded. "*Why* wouldn't I do?"

"The idea!" cried Pattie Batch, her gray eyes popping.

John Fairmeadow was forthwith shooed into the night and rainy wind to cool his ardour.

John Fairmeadow laughed all the way to Swamp's End. Sometimes it was a roar of laughter, with his head thrown back; sometimes it was a quiet chuckle; sometimes it was laughter without much mirth in it, at all. But at any rate, he was vastly amused with the situation; and he continued his doubtful laughter to the door of Pale Peter's saloon at Swamp's End. As for Pattie Batch, the conscientious little thing sat brooding for a long, long time; and she determined, at last—and fin'ly—that however much the baby might need a father, John Fairmeadow would never do. Never! He would not do at *all!* Admirable as he was in general—good and kind as he was—he was not desirable as a parent. Pattie Batch could not explain, possibly, precisely how she had come to this conclusion; but that she did come to it—and that thereupon she resolutely crossed John Fairmeadow off the list of prospective fathers—is a matter of history. She must address herself, she fancied, to the task of discovering somebody else; and having discovered a person of promise, she determined she would not let the grass grow under her feet. It would perhaps be a difficult task—it would surely be a delicate one—to disclose her mind to the victim; but this must be done, and done with good cheer, for the baby's sake. Singularly enough, when Pattie Batch had put the baby to bed for the night, and when, too, she had put her sweet little self to bed, she began to cry. This narrative, however, must now concern itself, not with the matrimonial adventures of Pattie Batch, but with the matrimonial adventures of no less a person than Gingerbread Jenkins, and the part that big John Fairmeadow played in them.

It will be recalled that Gingerbread Jenkins, having discovered Plain Tom Hitch agreeably employed with a flower, determined to reform.

"I reckon I'll get married," said he, "an' settle down."

John Fairmeadow had a word to say about that; and what John Fairmeadow said—and what he did—old John Rowl, of Bottle River, can tell better than anybody else.

XVIII

GINGERBREAD

IT was snowing at Swamp's End. The flakes were shaken to the wind from a thick sky to which the moon gave a narrowing circle of misty light. The gale came from the farther northwest. It ran over the pines, broken free of the mountains, and, careering unaware, tumbled headlong into the little clearing at Kettle camp of the Bottle River cutting, where it swirled bewildered and angry. Having rattled the windows of the bunk-houses in a flush of indignation—and having shaken the doors in complaint—and having beaten the roofs in a vicious prank of the night—and having poked cold and searching fingers with impudent curiosity into every smallest crevice of these low log habitations—and having howled in the lustiest fashion through all the agitated experience—it rushed away to the big woods, whisking off the smoke of the cabin fires and their short-lived sparks. The smoke found good company and an engaging adventure with the roistering wind, it seemed; but the aspiring little sparks, flashing gladly in the free wind's wake, died of frosty hardship in the first eager flight. It was Sunday night: an idle time—with cold weather and a blinding gale to keep men close to encouraging company and to the fires. Rowl, the scaler, weathered to the knot and grain of his tall nature by fifty years of forest labour, and grown vastly sentimental in the same silence and isolation and forming companionship, kicked open the door of the superintendent's stove and flung in more wood, growling contemptuously in answer to the wind's big roaring, his big face scowling and red in the furnace glow.

"Married?" Rowl growled. "Of course, he's married!"

The superintendent laughed.

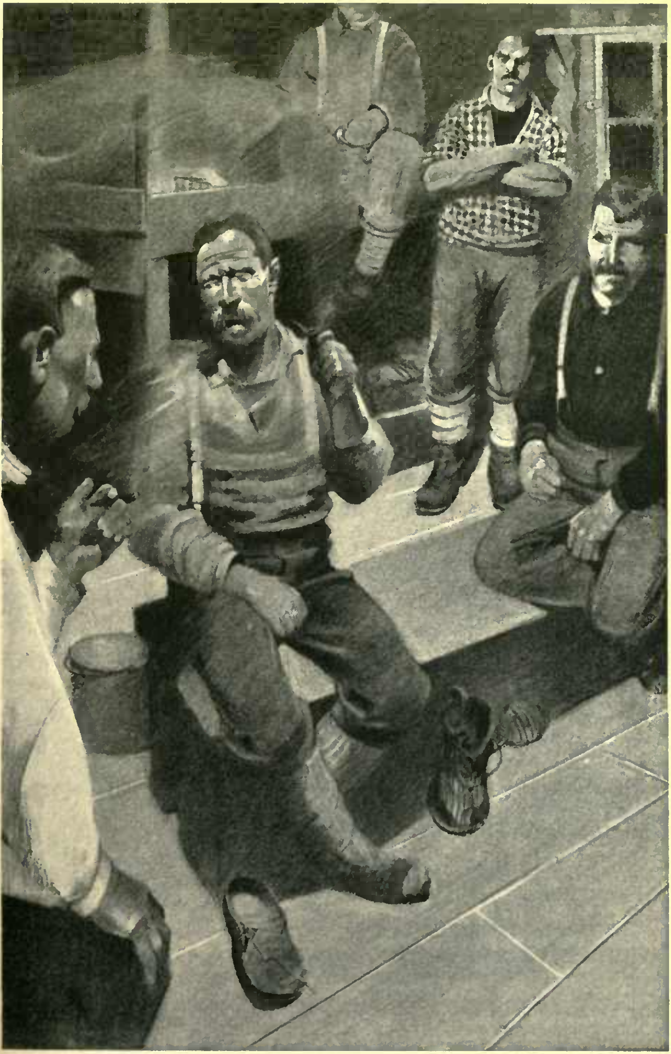
"Why shouldn't he be married?" Rowl demanded.

"Why should he?" the superintendent retorted.

"For one reason," Rowl drawled, "because John Fairmeadow was willin' t' tie the knot."

The superintendent laughed again. "But you see," he began, "Gingerbread Jenkins ——"

"Look here!" Rowl interrupted, impatiently. "It's all very well for you young lusty bucks t' squat here at this fire on a windy night an' guess about men an' women. It's all very well for you t' warm your shanks, an' toast your souls, an' gab an' declare about men an' women. It's all very well for you t' take a child's chart o' the



"It's all very well for you t' warm your shanks an' toast your souls," Roul growled.

world in your hands an' discover the worth of a man to a woman an' the service she owes him. It's all very well for you, I've no doubt, t' look for God's purposes in the dark an' troubled hearts of us all with a lantern o' half-baked experience an' devil's wishes. It's youth t' guess—t' guess, an' t' have no obligations, an' t' pay nothin'. It's youth t' take without thinkin', an' t' complain o' burnt fingers. It's youth t' blame God for its own stupidity. It's youth t' plan a better world than the Ancient of Days Himself could make with His own Almighty Hands out o' the knowledge of His years and all the pain o' them. It's youth to excuse itself, an' t' find fault, an' t' whine of injustice, an' t' curse the law it has stupidly offended. It's age t' laugh at guesses; it's age t' content itself with wonder—t' find wisdom in visions—t' know the law—to accept an' t' be still. An' as for Gingerbread Jenkins an' John Fairmeadow an' the woman," he concluded, his emotion breaking in a quiet chuckle, "why ——"

"Well?" said the superintendent.

"Well," the scaler drawled, "I never could quite figure it out that a sot o' Swamp's End had much t' spare in the same room with the mother of a child."

"What child?"

"Why, *any* child!" Rowl burst out. "Anybody's child! Don't you understand?"

Rowl went on with the tale of Gingerbread Jenkins. . . .

"'Tis a big and curious world, no doubt," Rowl began, after a little brooding pause, with a chuckle in which was more of melancholy than of laughter, "an' no discredit t' the reputation of its Maker, as I do grant an' believe. I've been a lover o' books, in my time, though no great reader o' the hearts o' livin' men; but 'tis doubtless true o' cities, as 'tis the almighty truth o' these woods, that a man's soul gives him small bother 'til he's strangled it. 'Tis right there on the job, mindin' its own business, workin' overtime, with as little fuss as may be an' no thanks at all, t' turn out courage an' hope an' kindness fresh for the day's need. But in all the world 'tis God help a man once he's seen his soul lyin' dead at his feet! There's always a land left, no doubt, where the law can't find a man, a new place, on the face o' the earth, t' hide from what can't follow; but there's no new land for the man who's once clapped eyes on his own dead soul. An' that was the trouble with poor Gingerbread Jenkins. He come blithe from the north coast, by way o' the Maine woods, t' log out here on Bottle River, a lad as clean as morning, with a taste for stars an' trees an' the habit o' chuckles, an' with the same word for all women as for the mother he'd write to every Sunday night, by the light of a lantern in his bunk. But 'twas no great tale of years, as the years fall upon careful men, before Pale Peter's whiskey an' the lights o' Swamp's End had turned him into the gray-headed, frowzy little grouch that he was before John Fairmeadow got hold of him.

"'Good God!' they'd say, that knew him once, 'is *that* young Gingerbread Jenkins?'

"'Jus' the leavin's,' says I. 'That used t' be Gingerbread Jenkins. The devil's picked him t' the bones.'

"'Quick work,' says they.

"'The devil feeds fast on a good man,' says I, 'when not interrupted.'

"But Gingerbread didn't know.

"'Rowl,' Gingerbread whined once, last winter, when he come crawlin' back t' camp from Swamp's End, all a-jump from liquor, 'I've had my fling, now, and I'm through. I know when *I* got enough.'

"'Huh!' says I.

"'Yes, I am,' says he. 'I'm *through.*'

"'You're through, all right, 'til you make another stake,' says I, 'an' get the stomach t' hold it just where you'll put it.'

"'I'm gettin' too old t' travel with the boys,' says he. 'I'm tired, too, Rowl; an' I want t' get somebody t' take care o' me.'

"'Who might that be?' says I.

"'Well,' says he, 'a woman.'

"'It's been done before,' says I.

"'Jus' about time I married,' says he, 'an' settled down.'

"'It's been done before,' says I, 'by men like you.'

"'Yes,' says he; 'that's the way it goes, as a usual thing. You see, Rowl, it's natural. When a man gets t' my age he's pretty much always had his fill; an' then he just naturally marries an' settles down.'

"'What you gettin' married *for?*' says I.

"'Well,' says he, 'nothin' like a good woman t' steady a man. You take a good woman, Rowl, an' if she's been well fetched up an' careful of herself, she'll be clever at that, as well as useful in other ways. That's the *business* o' women. A good woman, Rowl—a sweet little womanly sort o' girl who's lived all her life in her own home an' not seen too much o' the world—is jus' the sort o' wife a man who's lived too free will get for himself if he knows what he's about. An' a man who's lived too free isn't the sort t' be fooled in a little matter like that. I know you, Rowl,' says he, 'an' I know you're no hand for matrimony; but you're makin' a big mistake. There ain't nothin' in the world like a good woman t' take care of a man, an' steady him, when he's had his fill. I been thinkin',' says he, 'that if I went slow, an' picked 'em over, an' chose with my eyes open, I might get the right sort t' look after me. I'd be a sight better off,' says he, 'with a little homestead out here, an' a wife t' keep it, than I am sleepin' in a bunk-house an' pushin' my stake over the bars o' Swamp's End. An' anyhow,' says he, 'I'm tired o' liquor.'

"'You got a little woman handy?' says I.

"'Not handy,' says he; 'but back where I come from, Rowl, there's a little girl that used t' be wonderful fond o' me. She's a comfortable little thing, too, Rowl, an' might answer very well, if I give her a fair show in the beginning. A man ought t' give a little girl like that a chance t' get the hang o' things before he passes judgment on whether she's goin' t' do or not. There's many a man that doesn't; but as for me, I'm not o' that kind—I got feelin's. I been thinkin' o' the little thing back home,' says he, 'but I haven't quite made up my mind.'

"'How long is it since you've saw her?' says I.

"'She's not overly old yet,' says he.

"'What I meant t' say,' says I, 'is how long is it since she's saw *you?*'

"'A man,' says he, 'don't change much in fifteen year.'

"'That's all right,' says I; 'but the thing for you t' do, jus' now, Gingerbread, is t' report t' the office an' go swampin' the new road t' the landin' on Round Island Lake.'

"'Swampin'!' says he. 'Me—swampin' again! You jus' wait 'til I get married, Rowl, an' I'll show you what a man like me can *do*.'

"'Nothin' like a little swampin',' says I, 't' show a man jus' what he really *can* do.'"

Rowl paused in the tale.

And that was Gingerbread Jenkins: that was the Gingerbread Jenkins of the old days and of the days not long past. Rowl's listeners were well aware of it. But there was a new Gingerbread Jenkins; and it was concerning the new man that the listeners were curious. They knew that John Rowl knew and would enlighten them; and they drew a little closer to the fire and to the old woodsman who was telling the tale.

XIX

THE BOY HE USED TO KNOW

"WELL," Rowl went on, "as you know, an' as everybody knows, Gingerbread Jenkins went home, after the drive o' that year, t' fetch a wife t' keep the homestead he was bound t' have.

"'I'll be back in the fall, Rowl,' says he, 'with a tidy little wife t' make home attractive an' keep me straight.'

"'Ay,' says I.

"'I've had my fill,' says he, 'an' I'm goin' t' settle down. *I'm* wise,' says he, 't' what's good for me.'

"'God help him!' thinks I; 'he's a hard lesson t' learn at the hand o' the Almighty's law, an' may take unkindly t' the teachin'.'

"What the little girl that used t' love the young eyes an' soul of him said, God knows! but I'm thinkin' she blushed ashamed, when the leavin's o' young Gingerbread Jenkins croaked o' love, an' that she was frightened, too, an' sick at heart, an' that she prayed with tears, that night, in her white little bed, because the Almighty had given her new an' sadder knowledge o' the mystery o' men. Anyhow, there was never a word of her from Gingerbread Jenkins when he turned up alone in the fall o' the year; nor has there been since. She's back there, now, I'm thinkin', with the grief an' loneliness that come t' women who love an' are ill-taught about love by the men they glorify. As for Gingerbread Jenkins, he'd been back home, not only t' old places, but t' other years; an' memory had taught him the change in his own soul, an' he was broken when he come again t' the woods.

"'I been back home, Rowl,' says he; 'but I didn't stay overlong.'

"'You stopped at Swamp's End,' says I, 'on the way back.'

"'Jus' for a little liquor,' says he. 'You see, Rowl, liquor's like medicine to a man like me.'

"'Yes?' says I.

"'I don't care nothin' about it no more,' says he. 'It ain't a beverage; it's jus' medicine—for a man like me.'

"''Tis a poor cure,' says I, 'for a man's soul.'

"'Well, Rowl,' says he, 'I got a good deal t' forget.'

"'See the folks?' says I.

"'Spent most o' my time,' says he, 'with a little boy.'

"'That's queer,' says I.

"'No,' says he; 'it ain't queer at all.'

"'Never knew,' says I, 'that you was much of a hand for children.'

"'Well,' says he, 'I used t' know *this* little feller real well.'

"'Your nephew?' says I.

"'No,' says he; 'not my nephew. But I used t' know him,' says he, 'real well.'

"''Tis a wonder he knew you,' says I.

"'Well,' says he, 'he *had* some doubts.'

"'He must be growed up by this time,' says I.

"'Well, no,' says he; 'he wasn't growed at all. Somehow or other,' says he, 'he was jus' the same jolly little feller I used t' know—real well.'

"'That's queer,' says I.

"'You see, Rowl,' says he, 'all my folks is dead, an' the folks that used t' know Jimmie Jenkins, an' t' be real fond of him, too, has been so busy, the last fifteen years, that they couldn't quite take t' Gingerbread Jenkins. After I made a little call on—on—well, on an old *friend* o' mine—I passed a good deal o' time alone; an' one day where I was passin' the candy-shop I found this little feller lookin' in the window. The little monkey! There he was, Rowl, lookin' in the window o' the candy-shop, an' pickin' an' choosin' like mad. The little tyke! I used t' know him real well. A nice little feller, Rowl—jus' a real nice little boy I used t' know—with blue eyes an' freckles—an' a little grin, Rowl, an' a little laugh, an' a little head full o' the nicest kind o' mischief. He didn't know no wickedness, Rowl; an' he didn't know no trouble, an' everybody loved him, too, you bet! So after that me an' him passed a good deal o' time together. We went t' the woods, Rowl, an' t' Sunday-school, an' t' the circus lot, an' down the river, an' up t' the school-yard when the boys was in, an' jus' everywhere else where the boys used t' go when I was a boy like him. An' then, Rowl, it struck me that he was a bit too young an' nice t' be hangin' around with a man like me. Seemed t' me, somehow, that I might spoil him. I wanted to keep him friendly an' good; an' so I thought I'd better come back t' the woods where Gingerbread Jenkins was born.'

"'Seems t' me,' says I, 'that I, too, used t' know that little feller.'

"'You did,' says he; 'but he was a bit older, then.'

"'He was a nice clean boy,' says I, 'when I first knowed him.'

"'Was he?' says he. 'Really mean it, Rowl?'

"'A good boy,' says I.

"'Rowl,' says he, all at once, 'I've lost my soul!'

"'It may be lyin' around somewhere handy,' says I. 'I wouldn't worry.'

"'I've lost it!' says he.

"'Well,' says I, 'when a man once misses his soul, an' wants it back again, he can usually find it, if he takes the trouble t' look for it right away.'

" 'I'll never find mine,' says he.

" 'Not,' says I, 'if you carry your candle in a bottle.'

" 'I'm not goin' t' carry my candle in a bottle,' says he.

" 'No?' says I.

" 'No, sir,' says he; 'never no more, John Rowl!'

" 'I've heard talk like that before, Gingerbread,' says I.

" 'Yes,' says he; 'but I *mean* it.' "

Rowl paused to sigh.

XX

A LITTLE ABOUT LIFE

"THEY care no more for a man's soul in the shanty saloons of a Western lumber-town," the scaler continued, presently, "than for a sour tin can. They toss 'em into the garbage-pail, or throw 'em into the back yard, with the same wish t' keep their barrooms clear o' litter. In Pale Peter's place at Swamp's End, an' in every other ramshackle, squattin', packin'-box-an'-tar-paper dive o' the town, from the Café of Egyptian Delights t' the Lumber-jacks' Rest, they never gave Gingerbread Jenkins a show. When Swamp's End goes west-by-north on the trail o' the lumber camps, I'm thinkin', there'll be a marvellous heap o' castaway souls left with the tin cans an' ol' shoes on the site of it. Gingerbread Jenkins worked on Bottle River, last winter, an' wasted in the saloons o' Swamp's End. 'You see, Rowl,' says he, 'I got a good deal t' forget.' 'Twas a week's harsh labour to his middle in snow for a night's waste lined up at Pale Peter's bar with a drove o' squealin' swine. 'You see, Rowl, I've lost my soul,' says he, 'an' I jus' *got* t' forget it.' A wonderful fuss he made about that soul when well gone in liquor. You know the way he went on. There was never a man so drunk—none so foul—that he wouldn't buttonhole an' bore him with a whimperin' tale of his state an' condition an' what he used t' be. But that was Gingerbread Jenkins. 'Twas spree in town t' forget the shivers in camp. That was Gingerbread Jenkins before John Fairmeadow followed him out t' the middle o' No Man's Lake an' opened his bottle in a blizzard o' wind an' snow.

"I mind I encountered Gingerbread Jenkins, shakin' with the liquor o' three days gone, an' drunk with the day's drinks, leanin' over Pale Peter's bar, that night. A mad night, too—with the crews from Kettle an' Big Bend paid off an' spendin', an' an Irish outfit from the Yellow Tree works t' help raise hell.

"'Come out o' this!' says I.

"'No time,' says he.

"'No time, ye fool!' says I. 'You've no time?'

"'You see, Rowl,' says he, 'I'm busy.'

"''Tis no strange occupation,' says I. 'You've worked hard at it heretofore an' might rest.'

"'All the same,' says he, 'I'm busy.'

"'Gingerbread,' says I, 'what's this new job?'

"'Well, Rowl,' says he, 'I'm insultin' the devil.'

"'Why?' says I.

"'I don't *like* him,' says he. 'He irritates me. An' anyhow,' says he, 'I got my idea.'

"''Tis a thankless profession,' says I.

"'You see,' says he, 'I'm doin' jus' as much damage as I can in the time I got left.'

"'You'll never get even,' says I.

"'Not if I waste my time like this,' says he. 'I ain't *got* much time,' says he; 'but by God! Rowl, I'll make the Ol' Man squirm while I can. I'll sauce him! I'm fightin' mad, Rowl. Never was so mad before. I want t' get even, God knows!' says he. 'I want t' get as near even as I can with the devil that misled me. I ain't got much time left, neither, t' do it in; but I'm usin' my time t' the best advantage.' With that he turned t' the bar. 'What's t' become o' all you boys, anyhow?' says he, lookin' the length of it. 'Eh?' says he. 'Is you boys got t' thinkin' you can dodge the lightnin' o' the Lord God A'mighty? All hands at this here bar,' says he, 'is a-goin' t' hell. That's what! You're hell bent, you poor damn' fools an' sots an' pigs. Haven't I warned you? Eh? Haven't I been hangin' over this here bar for the last half hour a-tellin' you you're goin' t' hell? You can't blame *me* for it.' He called the bartender, then. 'Charlie, boy,' says he, in a whisper, hardly able t' talk on account of his cold, 'pass the bottle. I'm athirst an' parched for rum. Look here, boys,' says he, when he'd swallowed his whiskey. 'There'll be some o' you get t' hell before I do if the rum holds out an' the signs read true. An' when you come face t' face with Ol' Nick—an' when the choir o' wee black imps waves their little red-hot pitchforks an' strikes up the hymn o' welcome—an' when Ol' Nick takes you by the hand—you may do me a favour, boys, if you've the mind.

" ' " Hist, Your Honour!" says you; "there's a hand back there at Swamp's End that isn't no friend o' yourn."

" ' " I'll never believe it," says he.

" ' " You'd best beware," says you; "he's insultin' you daily, an' he'd knife you in the back if he got the chance."

" ' " At Swamp's End?" says he. "An' no friend o' mine?"

" ' " The same," says you.

" ' " Huh!" says he. "Well, well! Much 'bliged. I'll have t' look into *this*. My men is doin' poorly in the lumber-woods these times."

" ' " Gingerbread Jenkins he's called," says you.

" ' " I've many friends o' the name," says he.

" ' " He's doubtless down on the books," says you, "as James Alfred Jenkins o' Argyle Harbour on the North Coast. Don't you make no mistake about the Jenkins," says you, "or you'll rue it. An' don't you let him in *here*. You let Gingerbread Jenkins go Aloft in peace. Otherwise, Your Honour," says you, "there'll be a mutiny in hell before you got time t' clap Gingerbread Jenkins in irons."'

"'I reckon,' says Pale Peter's wee little boy, who was sittin' on the bar at my elbow, 'that Gingerbread Jenkins would never get in if *I* kep' hell.'

"Well, well!" Rowl laughed, in a large and hearty way, "the boys howled with delight an' bought Gingerbread Jenkins another drink." He sighed. "God help him!" said he. "I left him, then, preachin' hell an' damnation, between coughs, in that roarin' barroom, t' get even with the devil, while time was left. He'd struck bottom, all right—an' struck hard, too: the little Jimmie Jenkins that Gingerbread Jenkins used t' know an' still loved.

"It was snowin' too hard for me t' take the Bottle River trail that night. There was a big gale blowin' down—a thick nor'wester at thirty below. Lord! but 'twas a nasty cold night in the open. I'd small stomach for the tote-load from Grass Landin' through the Blasted Cedar Muskeg: I'd none at all for the frost an' the sweep o' the wind on No Man's Lake. So I sat in the window o' Pale Peter's place—I'm no hand with a bottle—an' watched the snow drive through the light that fell warm an' yellow from the office. I thought a deal about Gingerbread Jenkins—perhaps overmuch an' softly for the harsh kind o' man I am. I remembered the day that he come t' the Bottle River camp: I remembered the clean, live, young look of him, an' the hope he had, an' the morning song on his lips, an' the love o' life in his heart, an' the unspoiled soul that was his. Well, well! he was a good boy, was Gingerbread Jenkins—a boy with a straight back, an' free shoulders, an' a head held up, an' eyes that never shifted, an' a laugh that wasn't afraid of itself in company. I'm older than him; an' I used t' think, I remember, that t' Bottle River at last had come a boy they couldn't spoil of his youth an' his wages. I was young, then, after all. I was only a poor damned fool. I didn't know, as I know now, that never a boy was born they wouldn't ruin on Bottle River. Ruin? Ay; never a boy they wouldn't ruin for the sheer sport! An' I kep' right on believin' in young Gingerbread Jenkins, until, one Saturday night, he went out t' Swamp's End, with ol' Bum Lush an' Billy the Beast, t' learn about life.

"'T' learn jus' a little,' says he, 'about life.'

"'Don't you go, Jimmie,' says I.

"'Jus' this once,' says he. 'I want to.'

"'Don't you do it,' says I.

"'Jus' once,' says he, 'won't do no harm.'

"'Don't you go,' says I.

"'Jus' this once,' says he. 'I'll only look on.'

"'No, no!' says I.

"'Jus' this once,' says he.

"'God help you, Jimmie!' says I.

"'Jus' once,' says he.

"They fetched him back on Monday mornin'," Rowl sighed, "pretty well informed. After that," he added, repeating the sigh, "he was what you might call a fairly inquirin' student. An' that's the way it goes," he declared, scowling, "with all the boys that come loggin' t' these woods."

It was still blowing high. The fire in the superintendent's office had burned to expiring coals. No comfortable glow of light—no red warmth—no genial sparkle and crackling—proceeded from it. The room was cold. And now the frosty gale intruded. It was blowing a blizzard outside; all the world of the woods was bitter with cold and wind and driven snow—inimical with night. The superintendent coaxed the fire to a blaze and heaped it with dry wood; and while it sputtered and roared with the lusty intention of recovering itself, they waited for the sentimental old scaler to resume the tale of Gingerbread Jenkins.

"John Fairmeadow," he went on, "tracked Gingerbread Jenkins from Pale Peter's place t' the middle o' No Man's Lake, the night I was tellin' you about, an' fetched him home on his back; an' within five days from that time, Gingerbread Jenkins was converted."

"Was *what?*" said the superintendent.

"Converted; 'tis the only word I know for the thing."

"Who?"

"Gingerbread Jenkins, I'm tellin' you!"

The superintendent laughed.

"You may call it what you like," Rowl replied, in a growl, "an' you may laugh to suit the word; but *you* don't prove nothin' t' *me*. I know that John Fairmeadow tracked Gingerbread Jenkins t' the middle o' No Man's Lake, that night, in a gale that chased me indoors, an' you wouldn't face t' save life, an' that John Fairmeadow found him there, broken out with the snakes, tryin' t' open a bottle o' whiskey with frozen hands, an' that he carried him home on his own back, God knows how! What John Fairmeadow done to Gingerbread Jenkins, when he got him home, I don't know, no more'n you do; but I do know that he kep' Gingerbread Jenkins in his own room over One Eyed Mag's for five days, an' that at the end o' that time Gingerbread Jenkins was converted, for John Fairmeadow tol' me so, an' Gingerbread Jenkins didn't deny it. An' I know, too," Rowl went on, his voice rising, "that Gingerbread Jenkins wouldn't stir out-o'-doors without havin' Mag's little Angel by the hand, an' that not a man o' Swamp's End would ask Gingerbread Jenkins t' take a drink when little Angel was along. An'

I know, moreover," he concluded, "that in four weeks Gingerbread Jenkins was himself again—that he came back t' the Big Chance Camp—that in three months he was rosy, an' clean, an' strong, an' happy, an' no more afraid—that he was a boss on the Big River drive o' that spring—an' that in the fall o' the year he was offered a superintendent's job by Ol' Rat Wallweather o' the Yellow Forks Lumber Company."

"That's a good deal t' know," said the superintendent.

"No, it ain't," snapped Rowl.

"It's a good deal t' know."

"It's the kind o' thing that any fool can find out an' know that wants to."

"Well," drawled the superintendent, "I ain't much up on miracles."

"It's nothin' t' know at all" said Rowl; "but it's a devil of a lot to explain ’

XXI

THAT MEASURE OF LOVE

"YOU can bet your life," Rowl resumed, "that they're all aware in hell that John Fairmeadow is on the job in this section. John Fairmeadow's on the job from the Big River to the camps o' the Logosh Reservation. There isn't a barroom in four hundred square miles where he can't call the bartender Johnnie, nor a bunk-house where he isn't at home; an' you boys know it. He's a big man. I mean it: he's a great big man—a man of our kind, and big by our scale. It took a man big in body an' heart an' faith—a bigger man than me in the ways that we know as bigness—t' put Gingerbread Jenkins on his back in the middle o' No Man's Lake an' fetch him t' Swamp's End through the wind an' snow an' frost o' that night; an' it takes a bigger man than any other big man I ever knew t' operate in a religious fashion, without cant an' all manner o' foolishness, in the bunk-houses an' bars an' dives o' these woods. I'm no judge o' Christians, havin' handled none in my business; an' I've heard ill tales o' their state in these days; but I know that an ounce o' John Fairmeadow t' the gallon o' this generation's Christianity would cure the wrongs o' the world in a day—an' I draw my own conclusions. 'Tis said by the boys from the East that men don't go t' church no more. I don't know: maybe not. I don't care. Anyhow, John Fairmeadow's a minister for men; *he's* no little sister o' the rich.

"At this time he hast headquarters with One Eyed Mag, which keeps the Mother-Used-t'-Make-It Restaurant, near the depot at Swamp's End, a large an' flabby lady, not open t' suspicion, a perfectly respectable person, poor soul! on account o' one eye an' various other varieties o' looks. These same headquarters was a home-made institution o' one room with a barred window for the confinement an' cure o' the snakes. There was a bit of a mystery at Mag's, too, with which the parson had nothin' t' do. 'Twas in the shape of a wee small girl—a pretty little rogue called Angel—which Mag foster-mothered like a lonely hen; an' 'twas this child that had led Gingerbread Jenkins around by the hand at Swamp's End while the wish for liquor was yet on him. 'Twas a mystery that couldn't be accounted for by no guessin' the boys o' Swamp's End was able for. 'Twas said that a lady from Big Rapids come t' see the child when nobody was lookin'—a real lady o' fashion with reasons of her own—an' I'm able t' say, as it turned out, that a lady from nearer than Big Rapids would often slip in at the kitchen door of a dark night t' see little Angel put t' bed; but it wasn't no lady o' fashion.

"'I'm a converted man, parson,' says Gingerbread Jenkins, one day in the fall, 'but I'm jus' as much ashamed o' myself as I used t' be. Seems t' me,' says he, 'that a converted man ought t' be *doin'* somethin'.'

"'You're workin', Gingerbread,' says the parson.

"'Oh, shucks!' says Gingerbread; 'any fool can *work*. I mean something big an' real.'

"'For example, what?' says the parson.

"'Well,' says Gingerbread Jenkins, 'takin' care o' somebody.'

"'For example, who?' says the parson.

"'Well,' says Gingerbread, 'somebody, anyhow.'

"'But *who?*'

"'Well,' says Gingerbread, 'a woman.'

"The parson looked Gingerbread in the eye for a long time. 'So?' says he.

"'Yes,' says Gingerbread; 'seems t' me that every decent man ought t' be takin' care of a woman, whether he's a converted Christian man or not. What's a man *for?*' says he. 'An' who else is goin' t' take care o' them? They can't take care o' themselves, from what *I* know o' them. An' so I'm fixed an' determined in this,' says he, 'that a decent man ought t' get married, an' settle down, an' take care o' somebody, an' *be* somebody.'

"'Are *you* able t' take care of anybody?' says the parson.

"'I'm able,' says Gingerbread, 'if I'm fit.'

"'Say that again,' says the parson.

"'I'm able,' says Gingerbread, 'if I'm fit. But that's what's botherin' me. I've lived free, in my time,' says he, 'an' as I figure it out there isn't much comin' t' the man that's lived free. So I'm not askin' much in the way of a woman. The more she'd need takin' care of,' says he, 'the better I'd like it. You see,' says he, 'that's a man's *business*.'

"'Say that again,' says the parson.

"'What's the matter with you, anyhow?' says Gingerbread Jenkins. 'You're hard o' hearin', ain't you?'

"'No,' says the parson; 'but I'm s'prised.'

"'I says,' says Gingerbread Jenkins, 'that the more she'd need takin' care of, the better I'd like it.'

"The parson jumped up an' put his hands on Gingerbread's shoulders. 'Do you mean it?' says he. 'Do you mean it—or are you talkin'?'

"'Talkin' be hanged!' says Gingerbread Jenkins. 'I'm not give t' talkin'. O' *course*, I mean it!'

"'You're a big man, Gingerbread,' says the parson. 'I wonder how big.'

"'I don't know,' says Gingerbread.

"'How big?' says the parson.

"'Well,' says Gingerbread, 'you better measure an' see.'

"The parson walked the floor in a deal o' trouble. By an' by he come up t' Gingerbread Jenkins again an' looked him right in the eye. It was then towards the evenin', John Fairmeadow says. An' John Fairmeadow turned Gingerbread Jenkins' face t' the window, an' looked into his eyes, an' tried t' search the last places of his soul. Gingerbread Jenkins says that he couldn't stand it no longer, by an' by, an' that he looked away from John Fairmeadow's eyes t' the sunset clouds beyond the pines, an' that he was afraid, but didn't quite know why. 'Jimmie,' says John Fairmeadow, 'listen t' me well; I'm goin' t' measure you, now. I believe you. I believe in your humility an' in your love o' the world for Love's sake. I don't misunderstand. I know. Love healed you, whether you know it or not in these words; an' now 'tis in your heart t' love, that some other one may be healed by Love, also. I believe that you want a woman t' take care of—t' guard an' cherish from the ills o' life—because you believe it t' be the duty o' men t' care for women. Listen t' me well, Jimmie Jenkins: I'm goin' t' measure you, now. You may do, if you will, what no other Christian man I know or ever knew—not I, most of all, God help me!—not I—would do for Love's sake. Stand up, Jimmie Jenkins,' says he, 'an' be measured by the measure o' Love!'

"Gingerbread Jenkins was frightened. 'What's all this, parson?' says he. 'What you mean?'

"'I know a woman.'

"'What woman?'

"'A needy woman with a heart turned towards a love just like this.'

"'Then,' says Gingerbread Jenkins, 'fetch her out. If I'm fit, I'm willin'.'

"'There's little Angel,' says the parson.

"'I love her,' says Gingerbread Jenkins.

"'She has a mother.'

"'The mother o' little Angel!' says Gingerbread Jenkins. 'I'm not fit. She's a lady.'

"'The mother o' little Angel,' says the parson, 'is no lady.'

"'No lady?'

"'No lady.'

"Gingerbread Jenkins jumped away from him. 'What you sayin'?' says he. 'I can't do *that!* I can't! Man, I tell you I *can't!* I'm jus' not able.'

"'No,' says John Fairmeadow; 'no man could do that.'

"'Speak plain,' says Gingerbread Jenkins. 'Little Angel's mother no lady? What is she then?'

"'What have *you* been, James Jenkins?'

"'I'm not what I was,' says Gingerbread Jenkins.

"'Nor is she,' says the parson.

"'Parson,' says Gingerbread Jenkins, 'I guess it's jus' about time for you t' lead in prayer. I'm tired,' says he. 'I'm all tired out. My heart's fixed on doin' right,' says he; 'but I don't know what *is* right.'

"'Nor do I,' says the parson.

"Gingerbread Jenkins says that at that very minute a flood o' sunshine broke loose from the clouds an' made the whole world light."

"And so," said the superintendent, "they was married."

"They was—in due course o' time."

"Risky," the superintendent observed.

"The mother o' little Angel," Rowl replied, "was as sweet, an' pretty, an' modest as ever a bride could be, an' shy in the presence o' so much joy. An' they're all away, now—an' they'll be up in Saskatchewan in the spring. You'll never see Gingerbread Jenkins in these parts no more. I've noticed that a man o' good courage," Rowl concluded, "will usually unravel a good endin' from the tangle of his life."

XXII

ON THE GRADE

FAIRMEADOW'S ministry to these great woods had a gentler aspect than that of denunciatory preaching and altercation. There were times, indeed, when, in ease of departing souls, he became a man of exquisite tenderness. When, for example, it came time for Mike Finnerty, the Cant-hook road-monkey, to die in a little room above Pale Peter's saloon at Swamp's End, whither he had been taken from the barroom floor, far gone in pneumonia, nothing would do the old Irishman but he must have John Fairmeadow come to shrive him. Fairmeadow was not at Swamp's End. Fairmeadow was off on the trails. Where? Beyond Cedar Long Swamp, they said, and bound north to the Snake Stream camps. A message to the Red Company's cutting might intercept him. It did: it caught John Fairmeadow in the nick of time—his feet were fairly on the white trail to the north—and Fairmeadow made for Swamp's End on a dog-trot which never let up until late at night the lights of Pale Peter's were visible in the wintry darkness. Mike Finnerty had come to the end of a long career of furious living. In the last years of it he had been a shrivelled little road-monkey in the meanest camps of the state —a gray, wrinkled, morose little man, given to silence in camp and to garrulous ill-temper in his cups in town. It was all over, now, however; and it may be that he was frightened by the prospect of this sudden change to that which, except for priestly teaching, had been a mystery to him all his days.

"Is that you, parson?" he whispered.

Fairmeadow took his hand.

"I'm glad ye've come," said Mike. "I got t' die, they're tellin' me."

It was evident that he had to die.

"Ye'll answer," said Mike.

Fairmeadow pressed the old man's hand.

"Ye'll do," Mike repeated. "Ye're priest enough—for me."

He was anxious, it seemed, for the soul that was about to depart from his ill-kept and degraded body; and he was in pain, and turning very weak.

"Parson," said he, presently, with a knowing little wink, "I want ye t' fix it for me."

"Fix it, Mike?"

"Sure, ye know what I mean," Mike replied. "I want ye t' fix it."

"Fix it, Mike?"

"Fix it for me."

"Mike," said Fairmeadow, "I *can't* fix it for you.'

"Can't fix it?" said the dying man, in amazement. "Then what the hell did ye come for?"

"To show you," Fairmeadow answered gently, "how *you* can fix it."

"*Me* fix it?"

"You."

"Me!"

Fairmeadow explained, then, the scheme of redemption, according to his creed—the atonement and salvation by faith. Mike listened. Presently he nodded comprehendingly. He continued to listen absorbed—and still with amazement—all the time nodding his understanding. "Uh-*huh!*" he muttered, when Fairmeadow had done, as one who says, "I *see!*" He said no other word before he died. Just, "Uh-*huh!*"—to express enlightenment. And when, later, it came time for him to die, he still held tight to Fairmeadow's finger, muttering, now and again, "Uh-*huh!* Uh-*huh!*"—like a man to whom has come some great, astounding revelation.

When Long Jock McKenzie lay dying in the hospital at Big Rapids—a screen about his cot in the hospital ward—it was John Fairmeadow who sat with him, as he was used to sitting, in those days, with all dying lumber-jacks.

It was Fairmeadow who told Long Jock that the end was near.

"Nearing the landing, parson?" Long Jock asked, with a smile.

Fairmeadow nodded.

"Nearing the last landing," the lumber-jack repeated.

"Almost there, Jock."

The lumber-jack pondered. "I've a heavy load, parson," said he, presently. "I've a heavy load," he sighed.

Long Jock was a four-horse teamster, used to hauling logs from the woods to the landing at the lake. For years he had humoured these great loads over the logging-roads—easing them on the down grades, calling to his horses on the up grades. And it seemed, now, that he fancied the last grade to be an insuperable one.

"Parson," he asked, "do you think I can make the grade?"

"With help, Jock."

McKenzie said nothing for a moment. Then he looked up. "You mean," said he, "that I need another team of leaders?"

Fairmeadow nodded.

"Another team of leaders," the lumber-jack repeated.

"The Great Leader, Jock."

"Oh, I know what you mean," said McKenzie. "You mean that I need the help of Jesus Christ."

Again Fairmeadow nodded.

"To make this grade," McKenzie added.

No need to tell what Fairmeadow said then to the Scotch teamster in his last extremity—what he repeated, according to his faith, about repentance and belief and the infinite love of God. Long Jock McKenzie had heard it all before—long before, at home, being Scottish born—and had not utterly forgotten, prodigal though he was. It was all recalled to him, now, by a man whose life and love and uplifted heart were well known to him—by John Fairmeadow, a minister of the old school.

"Pray for me," said he, like a child.

Long Jock McKenzie died that night. It was a gentle passing. He had said never a word in the long interval; but just before his last breath was drawn—while Fairmeadow still held his hand—he opened his eyes, looked up, and signed for the minister to bend near.

Fairmeadow leaned close.

McKenzie whispered:

"Tell the boys I made the grade!"

Forthwith he departed.

Fairmeadow's ministry was to men—to twenty thousand prodigals. It concerned women, too, perhaps: not many women—only the women whom the pale men of the towns found necessary to their gain—and no good women, at all. It was Fairmeadow who held the consumptive hand of little Liz of the shuttered red house near by Swamp's End while she lay dying alone in her tousled bed. It was a black night in the spring. Swamp's End was deep in mud. The trails were black and soggy. The wind came rushing from east—a black, wet wind, moaning about the shuttered red house and shaking the flimsy structure to its foundations.

The doctor from Big Rapids had gone.

"Am I dyin', parson?" little Liz asked.

"Yes, my girl."

"Dyin'?"

"Yes, my girl."

"*Now?*" little Liz exclaimed. "Dyin'—*now?*"

"Presently, child."

"Mother!" little Liz moaned. "Oh, mother!"

Little Liz was frightened. She was dreadfully frightened. Dying? And—*now?* The poor little thing began to sob for her mother with all her heart. Mag? No; she didn't want Mag. She wanted her mother. But nobody came. Perhaps it was just as well. John Fairmeadow was there—big, kind, clean John Fairmeadow. I conceive with what tenderness he comforted the little Magdalen—how that his big hand was soft and warm enough to serve in that extremity into which no mother could enter now. I fancy that little Liz of the shuttered red house near by Swamp's End died more easily—more hopefully

—because of the proximity of John Fairmeadow's clear, uplifted soul. And I know that when the exhausted little body was laid away in the field at the edge of the woods—I know that when Pattie Batch and old Tom Hitch and Tom Hitch's little Jinny stood beside the grave which John Fairmeadow had dug—I know that the spring sunshine was warm then—I know that not a flower of that green place drooped its head in shame. I know, too, that John Fairmeadow read the service prescribed—that he read it in certain faith that its prayers and promises were for such even as little Liz. *So also is the resurrection of the dead. It is sown in corruption; it is raised in incorruption: it is sown in dishonour; it is raised in glory: it is sown in weakness; it is rasied in power.*

Amen!

Fairmeadow came once to White Pine—a God-forsaken little ramshackle settlement in touch with the remotest lumbering operations of the woods. It was off the railroad: it was no more than a collection of frowzy, out-at-elbows, blear-eyed shacks on the bank of Black River. The shacks, of course, were for the most part saloons designed to purvey hilarity to the lumberjacks of the neighbourhood and a scattering of hardy homesteaders. The Big Scotchman, with whom Fairmeadow presently fell in, was drunk and shivering with apprehension of *delirium tremens*, at Smith's Café. The man was a homesteader, living alone on his grant of land, a mile or more from the settlement.

"First of all," Fairmeadow sighed, quite familiar with the situation, "I must get him home."

But how?

"I can't get home," the Scotchman complained.

"All right," said Fairmeadow, promptly; "then I'll carry you."

Presently—when this had been accomplished—the necessity of keeping the Big Scotchman where he had got him devolved upon John Fairmeadow. The "whiskey sickness" had fallen. The Big Scotchman was "took with the snakes." There was a long wrestle in the lonely little cabin in the woods. John Fairmeadow got the Big Scotchman down, at last, and held him down. It was a variety of John Fairmeadow's preaching. There was no choir, to be sure, the congregation was small, and there was no report in the newspapers; but the sermon went on just the same. John Fairmeadow got the congregation into his bunk; and for two days and nights thereafter he sat ministering—hearing, all the time, the ravings of delirium. There was an interval of relief, then, and during this John Fairmeadow gathered up every shred of the Big Scotchman's clothing and hid it. There was not a garment left in the cabin to cover the man's nakedness.

The Big Scotchman presently wanted whiskey.

"No," said Fairmeadow; "you stay right here."

The Big Scotchman got up to dress.

"My friend," said Fairmeadow, "there's nothing to wear."

Then the fight was on again. It was a long fight—merely a physical thing in the beginning, but a fight of another kind before the day was done. And John Fairmeadow won. When, at last, the Big Scotchman got up from his knees, he took John Fairmeadow's hand, and said that, by God's help, he would live better than he had lived. Moreover, he was as good as his word.

A rough lot, perhaps, these lumber-jacks; but they were still sentimental, upon occasions, and they were devoted to John Fairmeadow. And how lustily they sang John Fairmeadow's hymns in the bunk-houses! Not, perhaps, in appreciation of the sentiment, but for the sheer joy of singing. And at the Bottle River camps "Jesus Lover of My Soul" engaged them. They sang it again and again; and when they got up in the morning, they said: "Say, parson, let's sing her once more!" They sang it once more—in the bunk-house at dawn—and the boss opened the door and was much too amazed to interrupt. They sang it again. "All out!" cried the boss; and the boys went slowly off to labour in the woods, singing, *Let me to Thy bosom fly!* and, *Oh, receive my soul at last!*—diverging here and there, axes and saws over shoulder, some to the deeper forest, some making out upon the frozen lake, some pursuing the white roads—all passing into the snow and green and great trees and silence of the undefiled forest which John Fairmeadow loved—all singing as they went, *Other refuge have I none; hangs my helpless soul on Thee*—until the voices were like sweet and soft-coming echoes from the wilderness.

Fairmeadow was once taken ill in the woods. It was a matter of exposure—occurring in cold weather, after months of harsh toil, with a pack on his back. There was a storm of snow blowing, at far below zero, and Fairmeadow was miles from any camp. He managed, however, after hours of plodding through the snow, to reach the uncut timber, where he was somewhat sheltered from the wind. He was then intent upon the sermon for the evening; but beyond that—even trudging through these tempered places—he has forgotten what occurred. The lumber-jacks of the Cant-hook cutting found him at last, lying in the snow near the cook-house; and they carried him to the bunk-house, and put him to bed, and consulted concerning him.

"The parson's an almighty sick man," said one.

Another prescribed: "Got any whiskey in camp?"

There was no whiskey—there was no doctor within reach—there was no medicine of any sort. And the parson, whom they had taken from the snow, was a very sick man. They wondered what could be done for him. It seemed that nobody knew. There was nothing to be done—nothing but keep him covered up and warm.

"Boys," a lumber-jack proposed, "how's this for an idea?"

They listened.

"We can pray for the man," said he, "who's always praying for us."

They managed to do it somehow; and when Fairmeadow heard that the boys were praying for him—*praying* for him!—he turned his face to the wall, and covered up his head, and wept like a fevered boy.

XXIII

WHAT HAPPENED TO TOM HITCH

WHAT happened to Plain Tom Hitch, who had fallen in love with a flower, was told to the new superintendent of the Bottle River camps, at Swamp's End, long after, of course, its occurrence. When Rowl, the sentimental old scaler, observed, with a twinkling pretense of indifference, that the big stranger, amiably engaged with Pale Peter at the swing-shuttered door of the Red Tiger, was none other than John Fairmeadow, the superintendent attended intimately and with lively interest on the extraordinary fellow's appearance and behaviour. Fairmeadow turned out, in the new superintendent's eyes, to be a big man. The superintendent had known, of course, that he was a big man : he must needs be, indeed, to sanction the large tales that were told of him in those woods. But the superintendent had not conceived the clean strength of him. The superintendent had fashioned a hero of raw and hairy bulk, a low-browed, big-jawed power, recklessly driven to good ends, rather than a young, rosy, bubbling giant with a sharp zest for righteousness. Fairmeadow was clad like a lumber-jack, boots, mackinaw (thrown wide in the warm wind), and cloth cap, with a woodsman's pack waiting at his feet: a man ready for the trail. The superintendent observed that he had a singular habit of snapping his teeth in talk—of drawing taut the cords of his neck, of shooting out his head in a defiant fashion, of glaring from beneath fallen brows—all as though he might be used to being in busy and difficult opposition. With this, when he spread his feet and squared his shoulders, he took on an appearance of savage truculence, which, however, a gray twinkle and a wry twitch of the lips could mitigate even when his aspect of countenance was the fiercest. He was not a sour and fearsome prophet: he was a jolly parson. His pugnacious exploits (the superintendent fancied) must be ascribed to the quest of efficiency in his profession of preaching the Gospel.

"John Fairmeadow," observed Rowl, "is master in the house of his own soul."

It needed elucidation.

"A perfectly well-meanin' but industrious conscience," Rowl explained, "plays the devil with many a good man: John Fairmeadow is no servant of his, but master. I'm glad *I* ain't got none t' live an' quarrel with. I always pity the man," he added, "whose conscience wears the trousers."

John Fairmeadow put his pack on his back and shook it into place.

"So long, Jack!" said Pale Peter.

"So long, Peter, old man!" Fairmeadow heartily responded.

Pale Peter offered his hand for shaking. For a moment John Fairmeadow regarded the white fingers of the friendly saloon-keeper with a twinkle of disdainful amusement. He ignored the hand then, the wry twitch of his lips expressing a sneer, in which, however, neither malice nor contempt resided, but a nauseated pity, rather; and all at once he looked up, frank as a boy, and laughed in Pale Peter's face, who was not at all chagrined by this, but let his hand fall with an assenting and agreeable smile. Presently thereafter John Fairmeadow was striding down towards the tote-road to the Bottle River camps, which were now fitting out for the winter. There was with him, by this time, a close-cropped, gray, grave man, in health and self-respect, of good stature, well and confidently carried: a lumber-jack or homesteader, it seemed, whose appearance in pious company impelled John Rowl to a philosophical utterance.

"I can't make out," Rowl observed, "jus' how a man *would* go about the savin' of his soul."

The superintendent could not help him.

"Anyhow," Rowl declared, "give a man a good resolution an' a bad memory an' he stands a fair show o' pullin' through. Plain Tom Hitch pulled through, with the help of John

Fairmeadow, and hung to the dry side of his log, too, until Raw Jack Flack, of Big Rapids, pushed him off. It happened three years ago. But the tale of what Tom Hitch did—and the tale of what John Fairmeadow did—was kept close until the trial was over and almost forgotten.

"It's a mean poor pastime for an old woodsman like me," Rowl went on, with a wry face, "t' sit here in God's clean sunlight an' tell of Raw Jack Flack o' Big Rapids. The very name tastes ill in the mouth of a man: faugh! my tongue itches. He was a big man, too, an' good t' look upon: well-kept, straight-backed, pink-an'-white, sober, genial in the open, clever as Satan. In them days he kep' a flashy saloon at Big Rapids, the county-seat—an' kep' more than that—for the use of the boys o' these woods. With a horde o' pink-eyed little runts, runners, pickpockets, an' tin-horn gamblers t' father business, he got rich; an' bein' rich, with a spider's lust for politics, he growed almighty powerful in the county, backed by the big fellers at the capital. I never could quite make out which was in the saddle hereabouts, the devil or Raw Jack Flack. Almighty God?—well, Almighty God had few acquaintances at Big Rapids those times, an' them not votin' Jack Flack's ticket. Police, judge, magistrates, mayor, juries, janitors, an' scavengers: Raw Jack Flack picked 'em, paid for 'em, an' possessed 'em; an' the only law that *was* law in this county was the wink an' nod of this same Jack Flack. He'd have no enemy alive in the county. Not him! 'Twas quit or git for *them*. Consequently, Raw Jack Flack had friends.

"I've no will t' talk about the late Jack Flack; but I will say, speakin' in a mild an' indulgent way o' the dead, that the devil was hard put to it t' keep up with Jack Flack's inventions.

"'Good Lord, Jack Flack!' says he; 'how'd you come t' think o' *that?*'

"'Think o' what?' says Jack Flack.

"'The dirty trick you just done. It never occurred t' *me*.'

"'That's nothin',' says Jack Flack. 'Watch me for a minute an' I'll show you what I *can* do.'

"'Whew!' says Old Nick; '*that's* a good one!'

"'That's nothin',' says Jack. 'I bet I could beat that if I tried.'

"'You make me ashamed o' myself,' says Ol' Nick. 'When you get down here t' look after things, Jack,' says he, 'I guess I better take a vacation an' study abroad.'"

Rowl laughed without mirth.

"Anyhow," he resumed, all at once growing grave, "Plain Tom Hitch jus' *would* hunt the saloons o' Swamp's End for good deeds t' do.

There was no stoppin' him at all; he'd be there by night, when John Fairmeadow was away preachin', t' ease the boys in the snake-room, an' t' straighten 'em out on the floor, an' t' drag 'em where they wouldn't be kicked an' trampled on, an' t' send the sick t' the Sisters' Hospital at Big Rapids, jus' as John Fairmeadow done. An' one night at the Café of Egyptian De-lights, when Raw Jack Flack was at Swamp's End with the sheriff o' the county—understand me?—one night Raw Jack Flack an' some o' the boys from the Bottle River camps—the boys are a little bit rough when in liquor—one night Raw Jack Flack had 'em flatten out Tom Hitch on the bar, pry his teeth apart with a cold-chisel, an' pour liquor down his throat until poor Tom Hitch was able t' sit up an' help himself. Understand? Raw Jack made him drunk against his will. Tom Hitch didn't thank the boys for it: Tom Hitch thanked Raw Jack Flack, when he got up, an' said that he seen the fun o' the thing now, all right, an' that he felt a sight better than he had for a long time. After that it was Tom Hitch's own hand that tipped the bottle—Tom Hitch's hand that lifted the glass—Tom Hitch's lips that uttered the old abominations—Tom Hitch's heart that broke—Tom Hitch's soul that dropped back from the places of light to which it had attained. Raw Jack Flack an' the sheriff o' Saw-log County done the laughin'.

"Four nights later poor Tom Hitch come a little to his senses in the snake-room of the Café of Egyptian De-lights. Poor Tom Hitch! they'd throwed him there t' get him out o' the way, when he give signs o' the jumps. He wasn't sober yet; an' he stumbled all befuddled into the bar, where Raw Jack Flack was electioneerin'.

"The boys say he was cryin'. Butcher Long o' the Cant-hook crew says that, so help him God! he seen tears as big as rain-drops streamin' from Plain Tom Hitch's eyes.

"Anyhow, Tom Hitch said:

"'Jack Flack, you robbed me!'

"'You lyin' hound!' says Flack.

"'What you want t' go an' rob me for?' says Tom Hitch. 'It didn't do *you* no good.'

"Flack caught him by the beard, then, an' struck him in the face. 'Don't you say that about me, you pup!' says he.

"'Man,' poor Tom Hitch whimpered, 'you robbed me of all I ever had!'

"The boys crowded near t' see what Jack Flack would do. They say that fifty men—ay, a full fifty—heard him pass the threat. An' the sheriff o' Saw-log County was one; an' later, the sheriff remembered.

"'Get t' perdition out o' this county!' says Flack. 'You *hear me?*'

"'I got a nice little homestead here,' says Tom Hitch.

"Thank God, he didn't say that he'd a sweet little daughter, too!

"'It don't make no difference t' me what you got,' says Jack Flack. 'You'll be out o' my county in three days, you lyin'-mouthed dog, or I'll kill you on sight!'

"Nobody knowed whether he meant it or not. Not me: I wasn't there. But the sheriff o' Sawlog County was there—an' the sheriff heard what was said—an' the sheriff couldn't deny it when he come t' the point-blank question.

"It begun t' rain that night. It was rainin' then—the first big black drops o' that three-days' gale. Plain Tom Hitch went home in the rain. A dark November night—black an' wet in the woods—with a storm o' cold wind comin' down from the nor'west. Jinny met him—took him by the hand at the cross-trails by Swamp's End—an' led him home by the hand like a child. Little Jinny o' the staunch an' tender heart, God bless her! An' God will: for God knows, well enough, her sorrows of that night—her waiting an' her fear. Three days later—in the sweep an' pour o' rain—a flooded, wind-blown world—I come t' Swamp's End from the Bottle River camps. Lord! what a night. I mind it well: the wind—the rain—the black forest—the soggy trail from Swamp's End t' Plain Tom Hitch's little homestead in the woods.

"Tom Hitch wouldn't lift his face from his hands. 'Rowl,' he sobbed, in his hand, 'Raw Jack Flack went an' robbed me of my soul.'

"'No such nonsense!' says I.

"'He robbed me—he robbed me of my soul.'

"'No such nonsense!' says I. 'Raw Jack Flack ain't collectin' souls.'

"'I had something precious in my heart,' says Tom Hitch; 'an' Jack Flack took it away from me.'

"'Don't you be a cry-baby no more,' says I.

"'It come t' me after fifty years o' sinful life,' says he. 'It was real—it was real—t' me.'

"'Ah, father,' says little Jinny, 'you're jus' as good as ever!'

"'Little robin!' says Tom Hitch, lookin' up. 'The Lord's *always* been near you. You don't know what it means t' have Him turn His face away.'

"'No, no!' says Jinny. 'He'd never turn His face away—from you.'

"'He's no friend o' mine no more.'

"'Let Him do what He likes,' says Jinny, as she hugged Tom Hitch close to her heart. '*We* won't care. Father—father—you're just as dear as ever—t' *me!*'

"By an' by Tom Hitch stopped cryin' an' got up. He didn't say nothin' for a long time: he jus' walked up an' down—thinkin' almighty hard—with as gray an' harsh a cast o' face as ever I saw.

"It was gettin' late, then.

"'Rowl,' says he, 'I guess I might as well go out t' town.'

"'Hark t' the rain!' says Jinny.

"There was a great noise o' wind an' rain in the world. 'I wouldn't,' says I; 'not t'-night.'

"'Little robin,' says he, pattin' Jinny's head, 'I'll drink nothin' t'-night.'

"'I'm not afraid,' says she.

"'I got a little business in town, Rowl,' says he. 'You'll stay with Jinny, will you not?—'til I get back. It's jus' a little business that's heavy on my conscience; an' I guess I might jus' as well go out an' *do* it. It won't take long, an' it won't be hard; an' after I get it done I'll be easier in my mind.'

"By this time he had on his mackinaw an' cap an' big boots.

"He turned at the door; an' for a little bit he stood scratchin' his beard—thinkin' almighty hard.

"'Have you forgot something?' says Jinny.

"Tom Hitch looked at the gun on the wall. 'Oh, no, I guess not,' says he. He let his eyes fall away from the gun; an' he sighed twice. 'No, little robin,' says he. 'I guess I ain't forgot nothin'.' He stared at his hands, then—turned 'em back an' pa'm, an' worked the fingers, an' looked at 'em for a long time. 'I guess,' says he, 'I got everything I need.'

"'Good luck, father!' said Jinny, when she'd kissed him.

"'Little robin!' says he.

"I might have known—what that errand was. I *ought* to have known. And I might have kept Tom Hitch indoors that night. I wish I had. But I was a fool; and I let him go without so much as a suspicion of the business the man had in hand. I wish I hadn't—I wish I hadn't!"

XXIV

FAIRMEADOW'S JUSTICE

"JUS' before Plain Tom Hitch got back from the little business in town," Rowl went on, "John Fairmeadow came in from the Lost Chance camps on Ragged Stream, where the news of Tom Hitch had gone. It's a matter of thirty mile from the Lost Chance camps t' Swamp's End: John Fairmeadow had come it that day, God knows how! by the short cut through Cedar Long Swamp. A bad day for a man t' be abroad in the swamps: a worse night t' foot the trail from Dead Man's Ferry. There was now a rush of rain against the window-panes; there was now the patter of hail on the roof. And the big wind from the nor'west was threshing the forest an' cryin' at the door. I caught ear, once, of a rumble of thunder: I was troubled by it—a growl an' bark of unseasonable thunder. John Fairmeadow was wet t' the skin: he bled from the wounds o' the muskegs; he was splashed t' the eyes with the black mud an' dead leaves o' the last trail.

"Plain Tom Hitch broke in—weak an' white an' drippin'—with Raw Jack Flack's pistol in his hand. John Fairmeadow jumped from his chair, little Jinny cried out, a draught o' wet wind flared the lamps, the door was slammed, an' there all of a sudden stood Plain Tom Hitch, blinkin' in the light, an' lurched back against the door, a hand on the bolt.

"'Well,' says he, 'I done it!'

"No need t' tell what he'd done: 'twas writ plain enough upon him.

"'I killed him,' says he, gone hoarse an' breathless. 'I killed him with his own gun.'

"'Who seen you?' says I.

"'He was alone in the street,' says he. 'I waited; an' I slew him—there. I—I—*had* t' kill him.'

"'God forgive you!' says John Fairmeadow.

"Little Jinny ran straight t' Tom Hitch; an' she put her arms around his neck, an' she cried an' cried on his breast.

"'Sheriff's comin',' says Tom Hitch. 'They seen me—run away from—what I done.'

"'You better take t' the woods, Tom,' says I. 'Quick, man! I'll go with you.'

"Jinny hugged him closer.

"'No,' says he; 'none o' that for me, Rowl. I killed him. I slew him in the street. I meant t' kill him. I wanted t' kill him; an'—I want t' pay.'

"'Take t' the woods,' says I; 'they won't give you a show if they get you.'

"'I don't want no show,' says he. 'I want t' pay.'"

Rowl paused.

"I remember, once," said the scaler, presently, "sittin' with Jinny an' Plain Tom Hitch on Tom Hitch's porch—a summer's evenin', it was. An' there came a low whistle from the trail. It was Jimmie the Gentleman, one o' Pale Peter's bartenders, callin' little Jinny.

"'It's Jimmie,' says little Jinny. 'That's Jimmie's call—for me!'

"'For you, Jinny?' says Tom Hitch. 'Is he callin' you, my dear?'

"'Why, yes, father! Of course. That's Jimmie callin' me.'

"'I wouldn't go far, my dear,' says Tom Hitch, 'with Jimmie the Gentleman.'

"'Oh, no!'

"'You see,' says Tom Hitch, 'you might get lost. You might get lost, somehow, an' have t' wander, for a long, long time, if you was t' go so very far away—with Jimmie.'

"Little Jinny laughed then, an' kissed Tom Hitch on the tip o' the nose. 'Jimmie,' says she, 'would bring me back.'

"'He mightn't be able,' says Plain Tom Hitch.

"'Then,' says she, '*you'd* find me.'

"'I'd try with all my might,' says he; 'but still I mightn't be able.'

"'Pooh!' says she.

"'There's no man,' says he, 'that's sure of the way—in the night.'

"'Pooh!' says she.

"'God knows I'd try!' says he. 'I'm wantin' t' live for that—if need comes.'

"'Pooh!' says she. 'But since you're frightened,' says she, 'I'll go but t' the trail. I'm sure,' says she, 'that *that's* not far from home.'

"'No,' says he; 'there's a trail near every home.'

"Jimmie whistled.

"'Hark!' says Jinny. 'That's Jimmie again—callin me!'

"'It's Jimmie,' says Plain Tom Hitch, 'callin' you t' the Big River Trail.'

"'Father,' says Jinny, 'I'll go but t' the big stump at the edge o' the woods.'

"'Do, my dear!' says he. 'That's kind! An' the moon's showin' over the trees already. An' the little stars is out. So you'll not be all alone with Jimmie, after all. An' I'll be able t' see you from here, too. I'll like it,' says he, 't' sit here on the porch, in the dusk with ol' John Rowl, an' watch my little girl employed with courtin' at the edge o' the woods. Fly away!' says he. 'Little robin! Little robin! It's spring time! Little robin, fly away!'

"Little Jinny fluttered off t' the edge o' the woods.

"An' now," the scaler resumed, "when I thought o' Jimmie the Gentleman an' little Jinny, I knew what t' say t' Plain Tom Hitch, when he'd killed Jack Flack an' wouldn't take t' the woods t' save his life.

"'With you out o' the way, Tom Hitch,' says I, ''twill be easy pickin' for Jimmie the Gentleman.'

"Jinny pulled him down an' kissed him.

"'I guess I better live, Rowl,' says he, after a bit, 'jus' as long as I can. I'll go.'

"Jinny kep' on kissin' his cheek.

"'Little robin!' says Tom Hitch. 'Poor little robin!'

"'Give me that gun,' says John Fairmeadow. 'There's no clean justice here. My law's as good as theirs. I'll pass judgment in this case. Give me that gun. . . . One chamber empty. Good. The new circumstances call for two shots. The thing will adjust itself. . . . Are there lanterns coming up the trail? Not yet? Thank God, there's time! . . . A wet night. The trail's flooded. There'd be no trace of blood in that event. God Almighty's in this thing. No man could swear to a shot on a night like this. The gun? It can be found in the mud to-morrow. Rowl must attend to that. . . . Are there lanterns on the trail? Not yet? . . . Blood on the door-sill. Blood-drips on the floor. These will occur without arrangement. . . . Jinny, child—bandages an' water! And keep away from the door. . . . Are there lights on the trail? Not yet? God Almighty's surely in this thing. . . . And he *said* he'd kill him on sight. They heard him. Fifty men heard him. . . . The wind's in the northwest. Good! That brings the lee to the back of the cabin. The lamp will serve. It won't flicker. Jinny, child, keep away from the door. Rowl, you'll have to hold the lamp. . . . Stand up, Tom Hitch. Follow me.'

"We took Tom Hitch outside.

"'I can make a clean job of it at three paces, I suppose,' says John Fairmeadow. 'That's not too near for safety.'

"I held the lamp high.

"'What you goin' t' do?' says Tom Hitch.

"Fairmeadow paced off three paces.

"'What you goin' t' do with me?' says Tom Hitch.

"'Stand back against the cabin,' says Fairmeadow. 'There. Throw off your coat. That 'll do. Straighten up now. Let your arms fall. So. Don't move. Steady with that lamp, Rowl.'

"I steadied the lamp.

"'What you goin' t' *do?*' Tom Hitch whimpered.

"'Stand still, ye fool!'

"'For God's sake, Jack, don't shoot!'

"'John,' says I, 'what fool's work is this?'

"Fairmeadow lowered Jack Flack's gun. 'Rowl,' says he, 'there's only one way to save this man. Just one, Rowl—just one. And he'll hang if we're not quick about it. There's only one way, I tell you; and that's by manufacturing evidence of self-defense. The only way to manufacture evidence of self-defense is by hurting Tom Hitch. I don't propose to stand by and see this man hanged. Consequently I propose to hurt him. A gun? It's a risk. But the thing has to be done with a gun. . . . You know those men back there. Will they give Tom Hitch a show? Not they! Take to the woods? Nonsense! He'd never get out alive. But there isn't a jury in this county would convict the devil himself of murder in a fair fight. . . . I know what I'm doing. This is no new business for me. I've—I've—handled these things before.'

"'Tom,' says I, 'stand back against the cabin.'

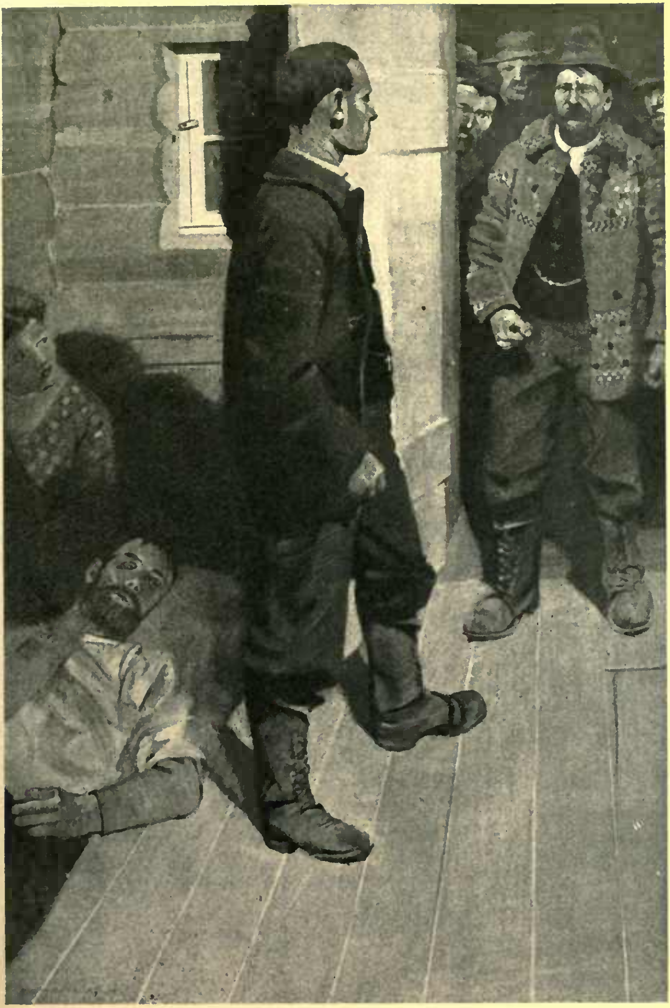
"Tom Hitch braced himself and looked John Fairmeadow in the eye.

"'Draw your shirt tight, Tom,' says Fairmeadow. 'I want the outline of your right shoulder.'

"I held the lamp close.

"'Ready,' says Tom Hitch.

"Fairmeadow hit him in the right shoulder—a clean puncture above the lung, as it turned out when we got the doctor from Big Rapids—an' Plain Tom Hitch crumpled up without a sound.



"I want Tom Hitch, says the Sheriff"

"'Quick with him!' says I. 'There's lanterns on the trail!'

"Fairmeadow was fumblin' under Tom Hitch's shirt. 'Just a minute, Rowl,' says he. 'Thank God! I got him clean!'

"'God's sake, man!' says I. I put the lamp in the cabin. 'Make haste; they're comin' up the hill.'

"He jumped up. 'There's enough evidence of self-defense in that wound,' says he, 'to persuade any jury they can pick.'

"'Take him by the legs,' says I. 'Make haste.'

"'All right, Rowl,' says he; 'no hurry.'

"We had Tom Hitch laid out an' stripped t' the waist—an' the hole stopped up—before the sheriff o' Saw-log County hammered on the door.

"Fairmeadow faced him.

"'Well,' says the sheriff, 'I want Tom Hitch.'

"'Keep that crowd out,' says John Fairmeadow.

"The sheriff shut the door on the boys. 'Now,' says he, 'where's my man?'

"'Not so loud!' says Fairmeadow.

"'Be damned t' you, parson!' says the sheriff. 'This ain't no Sunday-school picnic. I want the man that killed Jack Flack.'

"'He's hurt.'

"The sheriff looked at the blood on Tom

Hitch's breast. He tiptoed close. 'Who done that?' says he.

"'The man who dealt that wound,' says John Fairmeadow, 'will answer for the act in due time to Almighty God.'

"'The man's dead who dealt it,' says the sheriff.

"John Fairmeadow answered nothin'.

"'Good-night,' says the sheriff. 'You'll remember that Tom Hitch is my man.'

"We turned in once more," John Rowl concluded, "t' patch up Plain Tom Hitch."

"Did they convict Tom Hitch?" the superintendent asked.

"No," Rowl drawled; "they didn't convict him. They wanted to; but you see," he added, "the evidence o' self-defense was almighty plain an' convincin'."

"And Tom Hitch?" said the superintendent.

"It wouldn't be too much t' say," he replied, "that Almighty God blesses these woods daily by means of His friend Tom Hitch."

"And the little robin?"

"Gentleman Jimmie didn't get *her*, thank God!" Rowl burst out. "Not with Plain Tom Hitch on the job!"

XXV

THE TRIAL KISS

IN these busy days—and busy days they were, indeed—John Fairmeadow's thoughts occasionally ran with strange perversity—and with aggravatingly increasing frequency—to little Pattie Batch of Swamp's End and to her extraordinary quest for a suitable father for the baby. Pattie Batch must be looked after, of course: Pattie Batch must have the most perspicacious guardianship in the world in this respect—she must have the most profoundly wise advice—and the interests of the baby, to be sure, must properly be regarded. John Fairmeadow might have picked a father for the baby from the boys of Bottle River, he fancied, with whom the baby would have been quite content, captious as the baby now seemed to have become in respect to the company he kept. There were some fine fellows on Bottle River. There were young fellows from the East—big, hearty young fellows, merry, efficient and self-respecting—any one of whom might have sufficed to guarantee a reasonably secure future for the baby; and the baby, whose predilection for lumber-jacks was well known, would have been no doubt eminently satisfied. But a relationship of this sort implied a relationship of quite another sort; and it was with the relationship of the second description that John Fairmeadow was chiefly concerned. When it came to choosing a Mr. Pattie Batch from the boys of Bottle River—when it came to choosing a Mr. Pattie Batch from the boys of the Cant-hook and the Yellow Tail—when it came to choosing a Mr. Pattie Batch from the boys of Swamp's End and Elegant Corners—the good minister was altogether at a loss. There was only one young fellow, indeed, of them all, from Swamp's End to Lost Chance, whom John Fairmeadow could with any degree of equanimity consider; and when it came bluntly to the consideration of *that* individual, John Fairmeadow could only sigh and turn from these romantic musings to the grave problems of his ministry at Swamp's End.

"Thou fool!" he was used to saying.

It may be that having looked back upon the career of this particular candidate he lay awake under his blanket in the Bottle River stables: it may be that he suffered such pangs as remorse may excite to trouble a man; but when he chanced to encounter little Pattie Batch on the trails there was no shadow of melancholy upon him.

"Hello, Pattie Batch!" says he, with a broad, rosy grin.

"Hello, there, John Fairmeadow!"

"Found that father yet?"

"Nope."

"Looked 'em all over?"

"Nope."

"Got your eye on anybody in particular?"

"Nope."

"Near the end of the list?"

"Nope."

"Anyhow," says Fairmeadow, chagrined, "if you're not perfectly suited when you *do* get to the end of the list, be sure to begin all over again; and don't you forget, young woman, that I'm at the *head* of that list, and the very first young man to come up for reconsideration. You're going to give me another chance, aren't you?"

"Nope."

"What!"

"Nope."

"Crossed me off?"

"Nope. *Yep*—I mean."

"Well, well!" cries John Fairmeadow. "That's flat enough, I'm sure! And now, young woman," says he, in a fine pretense of indignation and despair, "will you be good enough to tell me what a love-lorn young man like me is to *do?*"

Pattie Batch found this banter delicious; and the more John Fairmeadow indulged in it, the more she chuckled and the more bewitchingly she grinned.

There was a large earnestness beneath this jesting guise. John Fairmeadow was persuaded, in his big, tender heart, that the suitable young fellow he had in mind would not only devote himself to the welfare of Pattie Batch's remarkable baby, but would with great love, perfect and abounding, chastened in adversity, cherish little Pattie Batch herself, would Pattie Batch but allow it; but there was at all times present with him in his melancholy brooding this prohibition: that the young fellow had himself in other days created the problem of his own unworthiness. Fanciful? Perhaps: John Fairmeadow's young man had been save in one respect not altogether unworthy in his ways; and it may be that in the uplifting labour of these days he had won back from the past all the rights of honour. As for Pattie Batch, in these jesting times, the conscientious little thing was sorely troubled, indeed; and many a night—many a night when the rain was on the roof and the black wind came howling from the forest—she cried herself to sleep. She could discover no father for the baby. There was not a suitable father to be had in Swamp's End; nor was there a promising candidate at Elegant Corners—nor in all that wide section, even to the Big River and the northernmost limits of the Logosh Reservation. That is to say, there was only *one;* but that one was out of the question—*quite* out of the question—and must be dismissed from mind, at once and forever, however much weeping might be required to accomplish the result. As a father for the baby, of course, the young man in question was perfect in every respect; but the foster-fatherhood of the baby, as Pattie Batch very well knew, implied a relationship which must not—*must* not—MUST not be permitted to encumber the young man's life with a silly, worthless, ill-born, ill-bred, dull, poverty-stricken, perfectly *ugly* bit of baggage like Pattie Batch, who never *had* been any good, never *could* be any good, and never *would* be any good, even to the baby, bless his little heart!

"No, sir!" says Pattie Batch, to the baby, who cared not a snap. "By ginger, it wouldn't *do!*"

With this the baby indifferently agreed.

"It wouldn't do, at *all!*" poor little Pattie Batch repeated, quite resolved that, at all hazard to herself, and at all hazard even to the baby, the glorious young man must be protected against himself.

"Yes, sir, by ginger!" declared this heroic little person, between sobs.

At this crisis, Jimmie the Gentleman, a bartender at Pale Peter's Red Elephant, came a-courting. What was in his mind, Heaven knows! I should not like to enter and discover.

At any rate, he was of a dashing way—a curly-headed, blue-eyed, be-jewelled young sprig of the near East, devoted to fashion (as it was to be found at Big Rapids), and possessing a twinkle, a laugh, a saucy charm, a bold arm and the conscience of a lively pirate. Jimmie the Gentleman came up the trail from Swamp's End of a soft June night. It was not his first appearance at Pattie Batch's cabin at the edge of the woods. There had been others—in John Fairmeadow's absence from Swamp's End, of course. And there had previously been certain flirtatious passages in the streets of town, of which Pattie Batch, ingenuous little one! being then on the lookout for a father for the baby, was in duty bound to take notice, since, as she was quite well aware, affairs of the heart commonly began in that way, proceeding from these small beginnings to the great event desired. It had for some time been evident that Jimmie the Gentleman was in love. There was no question about it, at all. The Gentleman's ardent blue eyes—his deferential politeness—his soft voice—his swift and tender little touches in the dusk—his significant phrases at parting—could mean but one thing; and that thing, Pattie Batch was *quite* sure, signified, in the issue of it, the employment of a parson. Pattie Batch had come imminently face to face, it seemed, with a declaration and a proposal; and she had already determined

—being a precise and orderly little person—her attitude in respect to the impending situation.

June dusk fell.

"Gimme a kiss!" Jimmie whispered.

Pattie deliberated.

"Aw, come on!" Jimmie pleaded. "Gimme a kiss, won't you?"

It was a tender night: it was soft and still and sweet-smelling at the edge of the great woods; and far above the little clearing the little stars shone clear, making the best of their opportunity to flash their serene messages to the world of hearts before the opulent moon should rise to dim their teaching.

"Just one!" Jimmie the Gentleman besought.

They were now at the trail to town. "Well," Pattie Batch drawled, in doubt, "I—I—been ——"

Jimmie slipped an arm around her.

"I—I—I been thinkin'," Pattie began, shyly, sure now that the great moment had indeed arrived, "a little bit about ——"

"Come on!"

"I been thinkin' a little bit," Pattie went on, quite steadily, now, "about gettin' married."

Jimmie stepped away. "Have you?" said he, blankly.

"Maybe," Pattie continued, "you better *had* kiss me."

The Gentleman came closer.

"I'll try it," said little Pattie, resolutely, "an' see how I like it."

Jimmie kissed her in his accustomed way.

"I don't like it!" Pattie cried, freeing herself, in a passion of humiliation and terror. "I don't like it! Oh, I don't like it!"

"What's the matter with you?" Jimmie demanded.

"I d-d-don't know," Pattie sobbed.

"Want another?"

"N-no!"

"Might as well *have* another."

"I—I—I'm awful th-th-thorry, Jimmie," Pattie wept; "but I—I—I *d-d-don't think you'll d-d-do!*"

The Gentleman laughed a little.

"You won't mind, will you?" Pattie asked, in a flush of compassion.

"Don't you worry about *me*," said the Gentleman.

Little Pattie whispered softly—earnestly—

"I'm so glad you don't mind!"

The moon had risen. Jimmie the Gentleman looked deep into Pattie Batch's glistening and compassionate gray eyes. What was in his mind, God knows! What he said—and this in a whisper not meant for the ears of Pattie Batch—was:

"No; you don't want *me*. I—I—wouldn't do!"

"Good-night, Jimmie!"

"Good-bye."

Jimmie the Gentleman paused in the shadows of the trail beyond Gray Billy Batch's clearing. He was still in a daze; but presently he laughed and went his way towards the lights of Swamp's End, whistling cheerfully along. Pattie Batch went into the cabin in shame such as she had never known before—burning, red shame, flaring in her heart and flushing her face.

Next day was the baby's birthday. Nobody knew the baby's birthday, of course; but next day was the baby's birthday, nevertheless. That is to say, it was Pop's birthday—the birthday of Gray Billy Batch, lost in Rattle Water, and decently stowed away in the green field near by town three years ago by young John Fairmeadow. The baby must have a birthday, to be sure. Why not Pop's birthday? The memory of Gray Billy Batch would in this be honoured; and the baby would be decently outfitted with an anniversary such as every other baby in the world surely possessed. John Fairmeadow was coming to tea. Nobody else was coming. There was nobody else, in fact, quite good enough—not *quite* good enough—to participate in the celebration of a festival so distinguished. And John

Fairmeadow came—came just when the shadows of the great pines at the edge of the clearing had crept near and the flushed sun was dropping into a glowing bed of cloud. John Fairmeadow was in rare spirits. He was quite irresistible with his banter. Pattie Batch, troubled little heart! and strangely detached from all this bubbling happiness, almost said yes, in sheer absent-mindedness, when he demanded to know whether or not she had made up her mind at last to take him for better and for worse. John Fairmeadow laughed—John Fairmeadow joked in his gigantic way—John Fairmeadow tossed and tickled the baby until that knowing prodigy (being now on the edge of speech) almost commanded him to behave himself—and John Fairmeadow ate and drank everything in sight when tea was spread on a little table outside in the sunset light.

When the stars were out and the baby had been stowed away—when the mild pine breeze had failed and the mystery of its silence lay again upon the woods and clearing—when the great moon had risen round and bright above the pines—Pattie Batch walked with John Fairmeadow to the trail to town; and there, at this old parting place, she stood downcast and disquieted.

"I have been wicked," she whispered.

"Wicked!" Fairmeadow ejaculated, in quick alarm.

"I have been very wicked."

There was silence.

"I *got* t' tell you!" said Pattie Batch.

"Tell me," said Fairmeadow, his alarm now grown beyond him, "just what a friend may know."

Pattie looked away.

"Tell me nothing," Fairmeadow warned.

"I got t'."

Fairmeadow waited.

"Jimmie the Gentleman—he ——"

"Well?" Fairmeadow demanded harshly.

"You thee, thir," Pattie gasped, "Jimmie the Gentleman—he—kithed me."

Fairmeadow started; but presently he possessed himself again, and continued silent, unable, for pain and rage, to utter a word.

"He—he—kithed me."

"That," said Fairmeadow, quietly, "is a matter easily remedied. Jimmie the Gentleman," he added, distinctly, "will not—salute—you again against your will. I will see to it that Jimmie the Gentleman—does—not—offend—again."

"I athked him to."

"You—asked—him to do—that?"

"Yeth, thir."

Fairmeadow sighed.

"I—I athked him," Pattie went on, "becauthe I—I been lookin' for a father for the baby, an' I—I thought I'd have him d-do it," she stammered, "t' thee—t' thee—how I l-liked it."

"Was it very nice?"

"No, thir."

"Was it nice, at all?"

"No, thir."

"Would you like him ——"

"No, thir," very promptly.

There was another silence. Pattie had no courage to lift her eyes from the moss. Fairmeadow stood in amazed contemplation of the downcast little figure. The stars looked down—winking their perfect understanding of the situation. The big moon peeped over the trees as though bound not to miss a moment of the comedy. And presently Fairmeadow laughed. It was no dubious chuckle. It was a roar of laughter—hearty and prolonged. And the stars winked as fast as they very well could; and the man in the moon grinned his broadest in sympathy. Indeed, the face of the whole sky was wrinkled and twitching with amusement, and kept grinning and winking away until John Fairmeadow—for the moment a daring fellow—took Pattie Batch's little hand in his, and tipped up her little face with his forefinger, and found her gray eyes with his own, and looked deep down therein, but not in the way of Jimmie the Gentleman. Whereupon of sheer interest the little stars stopped winking, and the big round moon, intensely agitated, peered with shameless curiosity into the clearing, and the whole world of sky and forest bent near, determined to hear, in this silence of the June night, every word that young John Fairmeadow should say to the little culprit whom he held ever so gently by the hand.

"Pattie Batch," said John Fairmeadow, severely, "don't you dare to do it again!"

Pattie flashed him a shy smile.

"Young woman," Fairmeadow continued, more severely still, "if ever you feel that a similar operation, performed with perfect propriety, would conduce to your peace in the world, just glance over your list of eligibles, and consider the name of the first applicant thereon set down, and then instantly come ——"

Pattie Batch fled chuckling up the path.

With Jimmie the Gentleman, at Swamp's End, that night, John Fairmeadow procured the favour of a word or two. The words were not many; and they were quiet-spoken—and they were uttered in private. Moreover, they impressed Jimmie the Gentleman. They were so impressive, indeed, that Jimmie the Gentleman might have repeated them, every one of them, word for word, had he been required to do so. The conclusion—which is quite sufficient to repeat—was this: "Jimmie, my boy, you have had a narrow, a very narrow, escape." To which Jimmie the Gentleman, having not yet quite recovered his colour, stuttered, in reply: "I—I guess that's right, Mr. Fairmeadow."

"It *is!*" said John Fairmeadow.

Jimmie nodded.

"You bet your life it is!" John Fairmeadow exploded, slapping his fist into the palm of his hand.

"Yes," said Jimmie.

"You'll remember?"

And Jimmie remembered.

XXVI

UNDER FIRE

NOW, at last, the great day had come. John Fairmeadow was to be examined for ordination. If all went well—and John Fairmeadow devoutly hoped that by some extraordinary chance all might go well—if all went well, John Fairmeadow would presently become a "real" minister. That was what the boys wanted; that was what they had with many flattering apologies suggested. The boys naturally wanted the "real thing." The boys *ought* to have the "real thing." Nothing was too good for the boys. John Fairmeadow was bound to give them the "real thing" if he could. Consequently, John Fairmeadow had for weeks—for many months, indeed—concerned himself in his leisure moments (which were few) with the sources of Christian theology, with the nature of God, with an intimate examination of the claims of the Trinity to existence in fact, with the origin of sin, and with exegesis, apologetics, church history, and the like; but he was not at all sure, with all his labour, that his information in respect to these abstruse affairs was either accurate or anything like complete. But John Fairmeadow must do the best he could. The examining committee would presently arrive; the committee would be ushered into One Eyed Mag's little parlour below and would there proceed with an embarrassing inquisition into John Fairmeadow's qualifications for preaching the Gospel. John Fairmeadow thought little enough of those selfsame qualifications, if theological learning were to constitute them; and doubtless the examining committee would think much less of them. But John Fairmeadow, industrious to the end, conned his great text-book of systematic theology, determined to acquit himself like a man, if for nothing else than to honour the boys.

Billy the Beast, who had lain since midnight trussed up on John Fairmeadow's bed, opened his eyes.

"Parson," said he, in amazement, "what the hell are you doin'?"

Fairmeadow proceeded with his reading: "'God dwells in the universe, and is active in the whole of it, but is not to be conceived as wholly occupied by it, or exhausting His possibilities in conducting its processes.'"

"*Readin'?*" Billy the Beast demanded.

"'By the immanence of God,'" Fairmeadow read on, "'is meant that He is everywhere and always present in the universe, nowhere absent from it, never separated——'"

"Gimme a drink," said Billy the Beast.

"No, Billy; you can't have a drink. 'The ideas of immanence and transcendence ——' "

"Gimme a drink!"

"You don't *need* a drink, Billy," Fairmeadow protested, without looking up; "you'll pull through without a drink." He went on with his reading: " 'The ideas of immanence and transcendence are sometimes set in ——' "

"For God's sake!" the Beast wailed, "gimme a drink."

Fairmeadow scowled. " 'The ideas of immanence and transcendence,' " he read on, with a sigh, " 'are sometimes set in opposition to each other, and each has even had its advocate; but this is needless and wrong. Each conception needs the other. Transcendence without immanence ——' "

A flow of soft profanity issued from the Beast's dry lips.

"Quit it!" Fairmeadow commanded. "You bother me."

Billy sighed.

" 'Transcendence without immanence,' " Fairmeadow read, scratching his bewildered head, " 'would give us Deism, cold and barren; immanence without transcendence would give us Pantheism, fatalistic and paralyzing. The two coexist in God ——' "

"Say!"

"'His omnipresent energy is His immanence; but so great is that ——'"

"Say!"

"'So great is that omnipresent energy that instead of being ——'"

"Say!" Billy the Beast roared; "am I goin' t' get that drink or not?"

Fairmeadow touched the Beast's pulse. "You are *not*," said he. "'Instead of being the fully-worked slave of the universe that He inhabits and maintains ——'"

"Say!"

"'God is its master.'"

"Say!"

Fairmeadow closed the book. "Look here, Billy!" said he. "You don't need a drink; you can pull through, this time, without a drink, and you're not going to get a drink. Be quiet. Go to sleep. Don't you see that you're bothering me? Leave me alone. I've enough on my hands to trouble me as it is. If in half an hour I don't know a good deal more about God than I seem to know at this minute," he added, impressively, "I'll flunk."

"Ye'll what?"

"Flunk, I tell you!"

"That's awful!" said the Beast. "Is it deadly?"

"Not necessarily," Fairmeadow replied; "but it's a very unpleasant experience."

When Billy the Beast had been completely informed—when he understood the nature and probable event of the impending examination—when he knew that examining committee was about to arrive with certain grave questions touching the nature of God—he fell quiet. "You go right ahead with your readin', parson," said he. "Ye'll need to. Don't ye mind *me*. An', say, parson!" said he; "if them sky-pilots says you don't know more about God than they do, you come up an' loose me. That's all you got t' do, parson. You jus' come up an' *turn me loose!* I'll fix it fer ye." Fairmeadow was then permitted to reopen his text-book, and to proceed to discover a great deal about God's spiritual purpose in the universe, and about His right of control throughout the universe, which the young fellow had not known before, at least in positive terms.

It was unfortunate, of course, that, the night before, John Fairmeadow had gone into the Café of Egyptian Delights; it was more unfortunate still that he had been moved to glance over the collection of stupefied sots in the snake-room. The collection had been large and varied: it was Sunday night. And however unfortunate it was that John Fairmeadow had been led to glance it over, it was more unfortunate still that he had found Billy the Beast a conspicuous member of that snoring gathering—Billy the Beast evidently come close to the drunkard's most terrible pass. John Fairmeadow forgot the text-book of systematic theology to which he had been hurrying; he forgot, even, that the committee was coming, that his ordination hung in the balance, that the boys wanted the "real thing" and that he had determined to give the boys the "real thing" if he could manage it. There was only one thing to do—only one business with which a lay-preacher could then properly occupy himself. Fairmeadow went for his wheelbarrow; and, having come again, shouldered the Beast, carried him through the barroom, flung him into the barrow, trundled him home, shouldered him up-stairs and put him to bed. Fairmeadow had thereupon spent the night with the erudite research into the origin of sin and the nature of God. It was not until past dawn—not until Billy the Beast had begun to stir and moan in his sleep—that Fairmeadow trussed him up with a length of stout rope which he kept in his little room above the Mother-Used-To-Make-It for that very purpose.

"That's not too tight," he thought, when he had accomplished this admirable precaution; "that won't hurt him."

Billy muttered restlessly.

"I wonder," Fairmeadow thought, "if God will ever save this poor fellow from his wretchedness. I'll pray again," he determined.

The which he did.

When the committee arrived, Fairmeadow bade the shivering Beast behave himself, urged him to make no disturbing noise, implored him in particular to make no effort to escape, eased his bonds a little, denied his plea for a dram of liquor, peeped for the last time into the nature of God as disclosed in the ponderous text-book of theology, and went anxiously below to One Eyed Mag's parlour, where a committee of two genially awaited him. They were fine fellows. John Fairmeadow was instantly persuaded of it. One glance was sufficient. "Glad to see you, boys!" he exclaimed, heartily; "it's awfully good in you to come 'way out here to the backwoods and bother your heads with a stupid layman." And to this warm outburst—and to a hearty shake of the hand—and to a friendly clap on the back—the examining committee responded with smiles equally warm. They were both young; and they were true to the type, in some respects curiously alike: they were smartly dressed in well-cut black, they were straight and virile, they displayed no marks of care, their eyes were frank, clear, intelligent. Fine fellows, both—young fellows of high ideals and easy consciences. Fairmeadow liked them. He was himself palpably inferior; he was big, and brown, and abrupt, and belligerent, and alert, and energetic, of course, but he lacked the refinement of his inquisitors—the small graces they so easily displayed—and his eyes, though frank and eager, were a bit bleared by his night's occupation, and his hair was tousled, and the legs of his trousers were tucked away in his boot-tops, and his attire was that of a lumber-jack, and his face was seamed with weather and trouble. However, it seemed not to matter at all. The examining committee had evidently taken a fancy to John Fairmeadow.

"Boys," Fairmeadow apologized, "I'm afraid I'm going to make a fool of myself. You see, I've been awfully busy. Out here, you see, it's the hardest thing in the world to get a minute ——"

There was a thump on the floor overhead.

"The hardest thing in the world," Fairmeadow repeated, frowning, his ear cocked for sounds from above, "to get a minute ——'

The thump was repeated.

"Yes," Fairmeadow went on, awkwardly; "you see, boys, out here in the woods ——"

The floor creaked overhead.

"I'm sure, Mr. Fairmeadow," one of the young ministers put in, to ease John Fairmeadow's embarrassment, "that you'll do very well. Now, let us not waste time. Let us ——"

"Of course!" Fairmeadow agreed. "The sooner this thing is over," he added, with manifest anxiety to have it over and done with, the while listening, "the better I'll be pleased."

"Very well! Well, now, Mr. Fairmeadow——"

The examination of John Fairmeadow for ordination proceeded. It was not a great success. In the first place, the candidate seemed for some strange reason to have no realizing sense of the importance of the questions he was required to answer. Instead of heeding his examiners as a diligent student for the honour of ordination might very well be expected to do, he displayed an odd and completely unaccountable distraction: so that he frequently ejaculated, "I *beg* your pardon, boys! What *was* that last question?" Moreover, it was observed that his replies were confused, not altogether, it appeared, because of dense ignorance, but because, in part, at least, of a lack of interest in the proceedings (from which his attention continuously wandered), and because of an acute and alert interest in respect to some mysterious happenings in a room above, these being quite foreign to the matter in hand. The committee was unfavourably impressed. Had the committee not been above indulging unkind suspicion, the committee might without doing violence to its common sense have suspected John Fairmeadow of labouring under a guilty conscience: John Fairmeadow displayed every symptom of the thing; and had it been at all possible for him to cheat the committee, under the committee's two noses, the candidate, such was his uneasiness and flushed condition and nervous demeanour, might fairly have been suspected of that disreputable business. In addition to this, the candidate displayed no impressive acquaintance with the origin of sin, could barely scrape through an apology for the Trinity, was decidedly weak in respect to origin of the Book of Genesis, was of doubtful acquaintance with the Church in mediæval times, and would be hanged (said he) if he could tell who was Cæsar of Rome when Paul preached in Athens!

The examination was eventually interrupted by a crash of glass proceeding from a room upstairs.

"Boys," said Fairmeadow, "you'll have to excuse me. I'm busy."

"Certainly," said the committee, politely. "And at your conven ——"

"I'm awfully sorry it has turned out this way," Fairmeadow apologized. "I've an unexpected little job on my hands. Nothing much," he added, hastily; "but it may take a little time."

The committee bowed sympathetically. "How long will it be before ——"

"Not to-day, boys," Fairmeadow replied, hastily. "I've a little job on hand that will keep me all day. The fact is ——"

At that moment the door was softly opened and a frowzy head was intruded into the examination chamber.

"I found yer bottle, parson," a hoarse voice whispered.

Fairmeadow flashed about in horror.

"Parson," Billy the Beast whispered, fixing the committee with a baleful glance, "is them there little dude sky-pilots givin' ye a square deal? If they hain't, parson—*I'm loose!*"

Fairmeadow was far too genuine a man to trouble about what the examining young ministers might suspect in respect to the bottle which Billy the Beast had discovered in his room. The bottle troubled him, nevertheless; it troubled him chiefly because Billy the Beast had all too evidently absorbed its contents, and was now, beyond question, not only in a mood to indulge all the devilish propensities and perversities which were accustomed to possess him when in liquor, but was helplessly bound towards the renewal of his debauch. Moreover, in that particular stage of intoxication, he was a dangerous man: he craved fight—a gigantic, savage, unkempt, flaring-eyed barbarian, spoiling for fight, in which he would not scruple to use his feet and his teeth, as well as his fists, if he could successfully employ them. And he cavorted into the room, forthwith, in the manner of a fighting-man, advancing and retreating with quick little steps, and feinting with his fists. He advanced, in this threatening manner, upon the smart little ministers, who promptly rose, and in some agitation, to meet him; and he demanded, with every evidence of the intention of knocking their heads together, of wringing their neatly-collared, slender necks, and of eating 'em up for dinner—he demanded whether or not it was their purpose to flunk the parson: adding, before John Fairmeadow could interrupt, that by the Eternal he would instantly put them through a sausage-grinder if they should display the least idea of "trying it on." It was an awkward moment for the young ministers: their intimate and authoritative acquaintance with the origin of sin, of course, could not, as they were well aware, preserve them from the sinful conduct presently to be manifested; but they were courageous young fellows, notwithstanding, and stood bravely to their guns, drawn up with dignity and flushed with resentment.

"Easy, Billy!" Fairmeadow put in, harshly. "Take care!"

Billy leaned close to the younger young minister.

"I want t' pull your nose," said he, softly.

The younger young minister would not by any means permit the indignity.

"It *needs* pullin'," Billy urged.

"Stand off!"

"An' I feel jus' like pullin' it," Billy added.

"Stand off!"

"Now, young feller," the Beast went on, rolling up his sleeve, "I ain't goin' t' hurt ye. Stand still, an' it'll be over in a minute."

Fairmeadow's hand fell heavily on the Beast's shoulder. "That'll do!" said he. "No more of it!"

"But, parson ——"

"No more of it, I say!"

Billy the Beast felt Fairmeadow's hand slip cautiously to his wrist. At the same moment he looked into Fairmeadow's eyes and discovered Fairmeadow's purpose. And he was not caught napping. He wrenched his hand free, leaped away, with an oath, and stood on guard, eyeing big John Fairmeadow alertly. Fairmeadow slipped out of his jacket, muttered, "Excuse me for a minute, boys!" to the young ministers, with much politeness, and advanced cautiously to the attack. It was a memorable engagement; at least, it was never forgotten by the young ministers who had come to determine John Fairmeadow's qualifications for preaching the Gospel to the lumber-jacks of that section. But it was not a long engagement. John Fairmeadow was not used to long engagements of that nature; they were altogether opposed to his religion and ethical policy. He went swiftly to close quarters with the Beast, dodged a terrific swing, and struck once before he leaped away. But he had not struck hard enough. "Pshaw!" he grunted, disgusted and distressed. "I'll have to hit him again." He went in for the second time with a grim and cruel intention. It was with the purpose of hitting the Beast so hard and at a point so vital that the gigantic lumber-jack would crumple up and lie still until he could be put to bed again. The affair must issue that way or John Fairmeadow's discourse would utterly fail of edifying Billy the Beast in any degree whatsoever. The Beast must not be permitted to escape to the saloons.

Fairmeadow advanced.

"D-d-don't hurt him!" the younger young minister feelingly stuttered.

Fairmeadow did not hurt the Beast. In fact—and greatly to his distress—Fairmeadow missed the Beast entirely. Whereupon, the Beast, with a whoop of triumph, laid John Fairmeadow flat, leaped for the door, vanished from the room, and scampered off towards the Café of Egyptian Delights. And Fairmeadow jumped up, ejaculated, "Excuse me, boys; we'll have to postpone this examination. I *must* save that man!" and took after the lumber-jack. It was night before he returned; and he was worn out, then, and infinitely depressed, and hopeless concerning himself, his ministry, and all the sinful sons of men;

but he had Billy the Beast in the wheelbarrow, and he carried the man up-stairs, and put him to bed, determined to watch with more devotion until the sot had recovered his sobriety and could control himself on the way to the camps of the Cant-hook cutting. In the meantime, the examining committee, having grown discouraged, had departed on the evening train, leaving word, in the form of a communication, couched in terms of distinguished politeness, that their findings, in respect to John Fairmeadow's qualifications for ordination, would in due time be reported to the Body by which they had been commissioned, and would, no doubt, eventually be communicated to John Fairmeadow himself. With this John Fairmeadow must be content. But the issue was not in doubt in his mind. They would not ordain him. How could they? Why should they? John Fairmeadow was far better aware than the examining committee of his own wretched ignorance in all things concerning the origin of sin, the authorship of Genesis, the Church in the mediæval ages, and the government of Rome in the days of the Apostle Paul. "Hang it all!" he ejaculated, while he sat with Billy the Beast, now and again feeling the wretched fellow's pulse, now and again wiping the sweat from his brow, "I've no *time* to cram up those things!" And having changed the subject of his thought, he came back, with admirable resolution, to the old question. "I wonder," he thought, "if Almighty God will ever save this man from his wretchedness. Anyhow," he determined, "I'm going to pray once more."

The which he did.

XXVII

BOUND THROUGH

IT turned out as Fairmeadow had foreseen. In the first place, Billy the Beast survived his debauch, expressed his contrition, renewed his conviction that he would "get home" next time, and returned sober, if a bit white and tremulous, to the camps of the Cant-hook cutting; and in the second place, the Superior Body would not sanction the ordination of John Fairmeadow. The communication to this effect was polite: it was exquisitely delicate, indeed—a very masterpiece of literary delicacy. It conveyed praise to John Fairmeadow, it congratulated him upon the work he was doing "in the Master's vineyard," it expressed the hope that he might live long to continue it, it furnished him with a benediction; but in terms which could not be misunderstood it at the same time assured John Fairmeadow that he would be no less serviceable to his Master and the Church—that his reward would be quite as sure and large—if he should continue to labour as a lay preacher and should forthwith and for all time abandon his ambition to enter the rough field of the woods as a regularly ordained minister of the Gospel. The communication left out a good deal. It left out, for example, the terms of the brief and rather humorous discussion of the case, which had taken place at a session of the Superior Body when the younger young minister of the examining committee had made his rather facetious report (he was a distinguished wag) of the occurrences in the little parlour of One Eyed Mag's Mother-Used-To-Make-It Restaurant. It omitted, too, all reference to an exchange of opinions aboard train, in the evening of that unfortunate day, when the examining committee, with a revived sense of personal safety, was making all haste from the proximity of Billy the Beast and his like.

"What do you think, Jim?" the younger young minister inquired.

The other laughed.

"Come, now!" the younger insisted. "Be frank."

"He's a rough diamond."

"He *is* a diamond, though. That's sure. I like him."

"An admirable fellow! A splendid fellow!"

"Admirable!" the younger agreed.

"Splendid!" the other repeated "I took a great fancy to him. But ——"

"That's it!" the younger interrupted, hastily. "That's the point! *But* ——"

"There's the dignity of ——"

"Of course! There's the dignity of the cloth to be considered."

"And ——"

"Exactly!"

"I rather think he will do just as good work as a lay preacher."

"I agree with you," said the younger, emphatically. "Let us report in that way. He's pretty rough. A diamond, of course—but pretty rough! There's no reason in the world why he should be ordained. And I really think that the ministry should be protected against the invasion of ignorant and uncultivated men. I do, honestly!"

Of all this, of course, John Fairmeadow knew nothing. His rejection from this body of accepted ministers—ministers in law and fact—cast him down, a little, but did not discourage him; and it did not enter his head either to accuse the young committee of unfairness or to abandon the work in disgust. Nothing of the sort! It was not long, indeed, before he began to laugh at himself. "To think," he thought, in amusement with his ambition, "that a busy man like me could cram up all that stuff in the time I gave myself! What nonsense! And I never *shall* be able to cram it up. I'm too busy. But I must be ordained. If I'm to be as useful here as I might be, I must be ordained. I must have the sanction of my Church. I must have the back-ing of my Church. If I am to organize my work —and I *must* organize my work—I must be equal in standing with the other ministers of my Church. But I've no time—no time at all—to cram that systematic theology. They must ordain me without it. They *must!* And by Jove! I'll tell 'em so!" It was with this object in view that John Fairmeadow replied to the communication of the Superior Body, genuinely congratulating the brethren upon the wisdom of their decision in his case, but requesting, as a peculiar indulgence, that he might have the honour of addressing the brethren, in his own behalf, at a future meeting. And in this John Fairmeadow displayed not only his wisdom but his goodness of heart. It was quite impossible for the Superior Body, with this limited knowledge of the applicant, to ordain John Fairmeadow; and John Fairmeadow had the good sense to know it.

The Superior Body was not behind in the display of good sense and kindness. John Fairmeadow was informed that he would in due course be notified of the time at which he would be expected to address the brethren. There was a long delay, to be sure; but in the meantime Fairmeadow was busy, and minded the months of delay not at all.

It was the custom of Pale Peter's Donald, upon occasion, to go preaching with John Fairmeadow; and Fairmeadow maintained—and Pale Peter assented with a laugh—that it did the boy no harm whatsoever, though it might make a preacher of him in the end. "Jack," Pale Peter was used to saying to the minister, with a grin, "if the lad turns out a better rascal than I, I'll be content; and if the good deeds you waste like water on the swine of these woods make him a better saint than yourself, I'll not be disappointed." It came about in this way that when Fairmeadow fell in with Billy the Beast for the last time at Camp Three of the Cant-hook cutting, young Donald was at his elbow. It was midwinter, then, and perishing cold in the world. There was a still, dry, scorching frost. It crackled brittlely underfoot—hard and sharp as breaking glass. It broke in the shadows and black branches of the pines; it seemed to echo in some uncanny way far off in the wintry forest silence. There was no wind stirring; the trees were black and heavily still, and no frosty dust was lifted from the snow to obscure the limpid blue air. The night bit like frozen iron. It was forty-two below in the woods twelve miles from Swamp's End: Donald proved it when they came to the superintendent's log office in the clearing.

It was late, too, when Fairmeadow and the boy came to the first chips of the Cant-hook works; but a full moon, risen above the pines, illuminated the logging-road they tramped and gave even some doubtful radiance to the muskegs and deeper forest reaches.

"Ha!" John Fairmeadow ejaculated, catching breath enough at a gulp to burst the lungs of many a man; "it's a clean world."

Donald laughed.

Fairmeadow blew out a vast white cloud. It enveloped him: his face was like a purple moon in a mist.

"I like it," said he, fetching the lad a clap on the back. "I like it very much. It's a clean world, Donald, and I'm very, very fond of it."

"As clean," the boy grumbled, "as a chunk of ice."

"Breathe deep," Fairmeadow chuckled; "the night's clean in the mouth of a man."

Donnie tasted the metallic air.

"God's own clean world!" said John Fairmeadow.

"There's no God here," said Donnie.

Fairmeadow caught a great breath again and beat on his big chest with both hands.

"No, sir!" Donnie protested.

"You can't tell *me* that," said Fairmeadow. He smacked his lips—the night sweet in his mouth. "You'll have to take that," said he, "to another shop. I know what I know, Donald. I know what I know."

Donnie shook his head.

"No God here, eh?" the parson cried, in mock severity. "I'll fix you, when I get you back to Swamp's End. Know what *you* want? You need spectacles, sir, for the young soul of you!"

"There's no God out-of-doors this night," the boy declared, with a wink he must crack ice to achieve. "He'd freeze to the heart in no time."

Fairmeadow laughed a little. "Where's He gone?" he demanded.

"I'm hoping," Donald answered, with a grin, "that we'll find Him in the bunk-house."

"Bunk-house!" cried Fairmeadow. "Shall we find Him in the bunk-house?"

Donald thought so.

Fairmeadow turned grave all at once, and his voice fell soft and musing. "So do I," said he. "I think so, too, Donald. I think He's in the bunk-house—alive and watchful and wistful in all those hearts."

Donald was once more persuaded that the parson was a very kind man.

"Some day," Fairmeadow added, "God will answer with power when I entreat Him. God not here, eh?" he went on. "Not in these big, clean, holy woods? Not in this great temple? Maybe not—maybe not. After all, He does not dwell in places, but only in hearts." He stopped to stare at a starlit ribbon of sky far beyond the black pines. "I had rather search for God in a barroom," said he, "than look for Him in a star. I think," he added, presently, still regarding the far heavens, "that God had rather lurk in the heart of some poor woman of Swamp's End—that He had rather lurk there, waiting, in some forgotten corner—than have the run of the whole wide Milky Way."

"Ah, come on!" Donnie grumbled; "my nose is froze."

"It'll thaw," said Fairmeadow, softly.

They laughed together and went on. The boy thought only of the peeping lights of the bunk-house, which he saw through frosted eyelashes. They gave a wide-spread welcome—searching all the pines—to fellowship and a red fire.

To warn the bunk-house of his coming—to enliven, too, perhaps, their lagging feet (there were twelve cold miles and a set sun behind them)—Fairmeadow broke out singing. Tramp, tramp! Their feet fell with new life in them. It was a stirring song. It was an old song of the road,

> "Onward Christian soldiers,
> Marching as to war,
> With the cross of Jesus,
> Going on before ——"

and it was sung with large heartiness by big

John Fairmeadow of Swamp's End. No other voice, perhaps, ever before so nearly matched the great woods themselves in the clear, uplifting beauty and significance of their own music.

> "Christ the royal master,
> Leads against the foe;
> Forward into battle
> See His banners ——"

There was an exasperated interruption:

"I reckon you're deaf, ain't you?"

The voice had come whimpering in complaint from the shadow of the blacksmith's shop.

"Hello, brother!" cried Fairmeadow, heartily. "Who are *you?*"

"Been a-howlin' on ye," the man in the shadow snarled, "'til I got my tongue near froze!"

Fairmeadow laughed. "Come out, my son," said he, "and let me look at you."

Billy the Beast stepped into the moonlight.

"You!"

"Yes, me!" the Beast growled.

The parson spread his legs and stared. He began to whistle, with much feeling:

> "At the sign of triumph
> Satan's host doth flee:
> On, then, Christian soldiers,
> On to ——"

"I want ye," said Billy the Beast.

"Yes?"

The Beast grinned like an ingratiating culprit child.

"What do you want of me?" Fairmeadow abruptly demanded. "Do you want to make arrangements to be hauled out of Pale Peter's snake-room?"

Billy kicked at the snow.

"Well?" said the parson.

"I want t' go home."

"Home!"

"I—I—want t' go home."

Fairmeadow regarded him gravely.

"Ye see, parson," the Beast went on, "I—I—jus' *got* t' go home."

"Home!" the parson ejaculated. "You—go home! To what?"

Once more Billy the Beast kicked at the snow. "My mother wants me," he explained. He sighed then.

The parson stared at him.

"Ye see, parson," said Billy the Beast, simply, like a boy who may excuse everything in this way, "my mother wants me an' I got t' go." He was almost triumphant in his reason.

The parson shook his head in bewilderment.

"I'll be out Wednesday night," said Billy, with much interest in his own doings. He whispered, slyly, "I'll be out Wednesday night." He peered cautiously into all the shadows roundabout. "The tote-road," he whispered, "close on nine. I reckon you'll take care o' me, won't ye, parson?" He sighed. "I'll have my stake in my pocket," he went on. "It'll be over two hundred. An' you'll take care o' me, won't ye, parson? You'll help me past Pale Peter's place, won't ye? If ye let me have one drink," said the Beast, "I'll never *get* home."

It was true.

"Ye see," Billy the Beast drawled, "mother sent for me an' I *got* t' go home."

"Man," the parson flared, "are you fit to go home to your mother?"

"I reckon," Billy replied, "that she won't care much about that."

"Not care?"

"Not once she gets me home."

There was a pause.

"Ye see, parson," said the Beast, in anxious explanation, "mother wants me, an' I *got* t' go."

"She's wanted you before."

"She's sick," Billy added, simply.

The parson would not speak.

"I want t' go home," Billy repeated. "That's all. I jus' want t' go home. Won't ye help me past Pale Peter's place?"

Donald turned away.

"I'll never get past Pale Peter's place alone."

Donald walked off.

"I tell you what I'll do, Billy," said the parson, heartily: "I'll pray for you."

"*Pray* fer me!"

"I'll pray for you."

The Beast laughed. "Is that the best ye can do?" he sneered.

Fairmeadow answered, in a flash:

"Pray for yourself."

"Hell!" Billy laughed. "Me?"

"What you need," said Fairmeadow, "is the grace of God in your heart. Get down on your knees and pray for yourself. Keep on praying. If you do that, you'll get through; if you don't, you won't get through."

"I reckon," Billy replied, "that prayer won't keep my throat moist when I come t' Pale Peter's door." He licked his lips. "Not moist," he added. "Are you goin' t' help me, parson," he went on, "or not?"

"It's no use, Billy."

"My mother's sick, I tell ye, an' I got t' go home!"

"It's no use, Billy."

"God help me!" the Beast wailed.

"There you are!" Fairmeadow ejaculated, delighted. "That's the thing! Keep on!"

"Will ye help me if I do?"

"I will!"

"Will ye put me aboard train?"

"I will!"

Billy the Beast collapsed to his knees; and he began an incoherent, abject petition. Presently—apparently overcome—he fell forward sprawling, his prayer spent.

"That's all right, Billy," said Fairmeadow. "*You're going through, this time, old man, or we'll know the reason why. That bunch of saloon-keepers at Swamp's End can't lick God and me and you!*"

XXVIII

FATHER AND SON

PALE PETER, in the little sanctuary at the end of the bar—in the red-curtained, easy-chaired seclusion from the bestial confusion beyond—in the cozy little harbour from all the coarse aggravations of money-making for his son's sake—Pale Peter stared out into the thick, whirling, darkening storm of snow. It was cold weather: it was cold weather—it was white, tumultuous weather, in which no lad should be abroad. Pale Pater wondered where the lad was. Where was he, anyhow? With John Fairmeadow, of course—with the quixotic preacher of righteousness to the swine of the woods. But—and the saloon-keeper had often admitted it—the boy was in the company of the only man of all those parts who could teach him a manly way. Pale Peter was glad; but Pale Peter wondered—and wondered in fatherly anxiety—whether or not Donnie was on the trails—whether or not, in that freezing gale, the boy was fed and sheltered—whether or not he followed, in that white, frosty weather, on the heels of a man enthusiastic beyond his strength, a man, indeed, given to the pursuit of his business beyond the strength of any lad to keep up with. Pale Peter brooded in the warmth and easy seclusion of his place beyond the bar. What would it all come to, anyhow? It was all for the boy—the robbery, the ruinous invitation, the watchful cultivation of every evil propensity in the camps, the damnation of souls old and young. In what would it end? What would the boy win from the opportunity his father's devotion would provide? Would he be a man, when they should go East into a polite world, with a fortune to ease and advance him? Or would he, helplessly corrupted by these scenes, seek only, and at any cost to the hearts of other men, his own way of indulgence and happiness?

"Donnie," Pale Peter thought, having imagined the boy in his presence, "how's it going to end?"

Peter fancied that Donnie replied:

"When I grow up, father, I'm going to be a man."

"A decent man?"

"A decent man, father."

"That's good, boy! I want you to be a decent man, God knows!"

At this point in Pale Peter's imaginary conversation with his son, Donald put his arms around his father. It was wretchedly sentimental, of course, that such a thing should enter Pale Peter's mind; but it did, nevertheless, and Pale Peter, indulging the purely imaginary caress, submitted with the best grace he could summon, which was grace enough, to be sure, to sanction the display. Pale Peter rather liked it: he liked the sense of fatherhood it gave him; he liked the childishness of the act—liked to deceive himself with this: that the boy was yet only a child, unknowing, affectionate, not able to be spoiled by the sins of lusty men, upon which he might look, but which he could not, being only a little fellow, understand, and never could imitate. Not Donnie!—not the little fellow whom Pale Peter could still take on his knee.

Pale Peter looked out of the great window into the storm. It was winter weather. Lord, how cold it was! And the wind was blowing; and the wind, coming mercilessly down from the northwest upon the pines and clearings of that section, was bitter to feel and fearsome to regard. It blew high—a wind with strength and frost and with the blinding terror of snow. Pale Peter was distracted from his musing—a musing he could manage and fashion untroubled by the realities—by the sight of a black, stooped, struggling little figure, far off on the Bottle River trail. The town—the situation of the Red

Elephant—the sweep of white, wind-swept, snow-burdened street—admitted of this view. It was Donnie—that black, yielding little figure. It was Donnie, sure enough! Pale Peter fancied, in a flash of alarm, that something must have gone wrong; but when the boy at last entered the cozy little office at the end of the bar—when he had brushed himself clean of snow—when he stood rosy and breathless and sparkling and straight before Pale Peter—Pale Peter was not afraid. Donnie was surely well. There was no doubt about *that!*

"Hello, kid!"

"Hello, pop!"

"What's the matter, boy?"

"Nothing."

"What brought you home?"

"Oh, nothing."

Pale Peter watched the boy throw off his little pack—watched him ease his sturdy legs of the strain of the laces of his big boots—heard him sigh—and observed that the lad would not look him in the eyes: wherefore he was again alarmed.

"What's the matter, kid?" he repeated.

"Nothing's the matter, pop."

"Where's Jack?"

"Gone to Kettle Camp."

"Without you!"

"I thought I'd come home, pop, while I could get out of the woods," Donnie began. "It's bad weather, pop, and I didn't want to get snowed in. You see," he ran on, with lively interest, "Billy the Beast's coming out from the Canthook on Wednesday. He's going home——"

"Again?" Peter laughed.

"Yes," said Donnie; "and he's bound through, this time. Jack swears it. Jack says that Billy's going through this time or he'll know the reason why. I think Jack'll win. And I wanted to be here, pop, to see him on the job."

"Good!" Peter ejaculated.

"Jack'll win, all right," Donnie repeated.

"Glad of it!" said Peter. "Nothing I'd like better," he added, "than to see Billy the Beast go home."

"It would mean a good deal, pop, around here."

"To whom?"

"To Jack and me, anyhow. Jack says it would help our work——"

"*Your* work!"

"Well, Jack's work, I mean.'

"All right, old man!" Pale Peter declared. "I'll see to it that Billy the Beast *does* go home. I tell you, Donnie, Billy the Beast, when I get through with him, won't find a bar at Swamp's End where he can spend a penny. If you want him to go home, old man, he'll *go* home. That's all right. Whatever you say will *go*. Billy the

Beast can't spend a cent of his wages at Swamp's End if you say the word."

"Hold on, pop!"

"What's the matter?"

"That's no good, pop. You see ——"

"But I want to *help* you."

"You can't, pop. You're on the other side."

"Oh, look here, now, old fellow! What side am I on?"

"The other, pop. And the best thing you can do is to play the game. We want to get Billy through, all right, and Jack is going to; but we want to see Billy *help himself*. That's what Jack says. All you have to do, pop, is to give Billy a decent show. You can't get his money, this time. Billy's bound to go through, pop. And if he gets through without any help ——"

"Donnie, boy!

"Yes, father?"

"Has it come to this between you and me: that you're on one side and I'm on the other?"

"Why, father ——"

"Has it come to this?"

"Why, of course, father!" Donnie replied, in pain. "You see ——"

"That's all, boy."

"Father ——"

"No, no! That's all right, boy. And look here, old man: I'll play fair, but I'll play hard. Watch out for me!"

"All right, father," Donnie replied, confidently; "but we'll lick the life out of you."

Pale Peter sighed.

"Yes, sir!" the boy reiterated.

"Donnie," said Pale Peter, gravely, "you don't seem to care very much about your father any more."

"Father!" Donnie cried, in horror.

"Not much, boy."

Donald threw himself into his father's arms.

When the boy had gone, Pale Peter had no relief from his mood. No ease at all, indeed! Pale Peter was not a fool. He understood precisely what change had occurred within his young son. He had, moreover, observed it coming, observed its gradual appearance and growth: there had been reproachful glances enough, God knew! in these last months to make the thing plain to the veriest dullard. Donnie's attitude towards the business had changed; whereas, sitting cross-legged on Charlie the Infidel's bar, he had once watched with amusement the knavery practiced there, he now turned in resentment from every trick of the trade. Pale Peter was perfectly cognizant of this; but he had not fancied that the change had gone so far—that it was a fixed and growing thing—that the boy had already taken sides against him. Sides against him? Sides against his own father? It was incredible! But it was true; and Pale Peter was neither fool enough to deny it, nor fool enough to be bewildered in respect to what had caused the change in the boy. John Fairmeadow was the source of it all. John Fairmeadow—John Fairmeadow's preaching and practice in the world of the woods—John Fairmeadow's manly way and uplifted soul. Whatever Pale Peter might think of the value of these kindly services to the lumberjacks to whose interests they were devoted, he was not fool enough to discover in John Fairmeadow a misguided, an ignorant, a selfish or a visionary man. Not by any means! Pale Peter was no fool.

But —

"Damn Jack, anyhow!" he grumbled. "I wish to God he'd never come here!"

But did Pale Peter wish that John Fairmeadow had never chanced upon Swamp's End? Not at all! Pale Peter was sensible of the advantage he had gained for his son in John Fairmeadow's presence. And Fairmeadow had played fair in the game he had undertaken—in the game which, indeed, he had been challenged to undertake. Pale Peter was perfectly well aware of it. Pale Peter had taken pains to discover John Fairmeadow's methods; and he had learned that however much John Fairmeadow might have desired to fashion the boy's attitude towards evil in the world, he had not sought to lay violent hands on the boy's love for his father. But there had been a change in that affection. If not John Fairmeadow's fault, whose fault was it? Not the boy's, to be sure; the boy was loyal to the core, and was not aware, as yet, that his filial regard for his father was endangered. It was the fault of the business, Pale Peter determined. The boy had grown faster than his father had known—had been too apt at acquiring the ideals John Fairmeadow had continuously exposed to his view. Pale Peter had been caught napping. But Pale Peter would wake up; he would nap no longer—he would act, and that without undue delay, to preserve for himself what measure of his son's respect he could manage to keep. He had fortune enough for them both, at any rate; they could go East in comfort, and Pale Peter, at ease, could watch the growth of his son in all manly qualities, and he would not fail to thank John Fairmeadow, in the meantime, for the fine progress his son had made. The boy would forget Swamp's End, of course; the boy was only a child, and —

But —

"I wonder," Pale Peter mused, "if he *will* forget!"

Donald *must* forget; and being only a child, of course, he —

But —

"I wonder!" Pale Peter mused.

Notwithstanding the fine visions he summoned from the future to comfort him, there remained with Pale Peter of the Red Elephant an aching sense of separation from his son.

It was yet early when the boy entered the easy-chaired little office at the end of the bar to say good-night to his father.

"Good-night, pop," said he, with lack interest.

"What!" his father ejaculated. "As early as this?"

"I'm tired."

"Why, kid, it's only ——"

"I know, pop, but I'm awful tired, and I want to go to bed."

Pale Peter took the boy on his knee. "Look here, son," said he; "what's the matter with you?"

"Nothing."

"Nothing at all?"

"I'm a little bit tired, pop; that's all."

Pale Peter mused for a little, looking, the while, into the black, windy street, and upon the lights of the rival Café of Egyptian Delights, blazing across the way.

"Donnie!" said he.

"Yes, father?"

"Somehow, boy," Pale Peter went on, "you're not very happy any more. Be frank with your father, boy. Tell him what's the matter. He'll fix it, boy; whatever it is, he'll fix it."

Donnie made no answer.

"Come, son!"

"Why, pop," Donnie exclaimed, sitting up, his eyes looking straight into his father's, and with the light of accusation blazing in them, "you see ——"

"Well?"

"Oh, I can't tell you!"

"What's the matter, boy?"

"Nothing! There's nothing the matter! Nothing! Nothing! I'm tired. That's all, pop."

"What do you want me to do?"

"Nothing."

There was silence, then, for a time, between the two. The gale waxed in strength. It was deep night—deep and terrible with darkness—with deeper night impending. Pale Peter, looking out from his easy chair into the cold swirl of the world, was troubled; and being troubled—being apprehensive of that which he could not see—he slipped a fatherly arm about his child, than whom, in all the world, there was nobody else to cling to and protect. Deep night outside, indeed, cruel with frost and wind and darkness! Deeper night impending!

"Donnie!" Pale Peter whispered.

"Yes, father?"

"I know what's the matter, boy; and I'm going to fix it, too."

"Fix what?" Donnie dully asked.

"Never mind, boy! But I'm going to fix it. And you'll be glad—when I've done what you want me to do. I'll not tell you, Donnie. I'll *show* you! And you'll be glad."

"That's good."

Donnie began feverishly to move in his father's arms. Pale Peter could not quiet him. The boy was hot and restless and ill at ease. The trail from the Cant-hook had evidently been too much for him. A rest would do him good—a long, sound sleep. And a long, sound sleep he should have!

Ay, indeed!

"Time for bed, Donnie," said Pale Peter.

Donnie yawned.

"Off you go, boy!"

"Yep."

"You're tired, kid," Pale Peter laughed.

"Yep, pop," said Donnie, returning the laugh. "I'm awful tired. Good-night, pop."

"Good-night."

The boy moved away—but halted and turned—and came again.

"We're all right, aren't we, boy?" Pale Peter rallied him, smiling.

"You bet we are!"

"We're going to be on the same side, after this, aren't we?"

"You bet we are, pop!"

"You bet we are!"

Donnie stood undecided.

"Well?" his father asked.

"Anybody looking, pop?"

"No."

Donnie brushed his lips against his father's cheek. "Just like it used to be," said he, happily, "when I was only a kid."

"Just like it used to be," said Pale Peter, with feeling, "thank God!"

"Good-night, pop."

"Good-night."

"I'm *awful* tired," Donnie yawned.

It occurred to Pale Peter, all at once—this was late in the night—that the boy was ill. "Good God!" thought he; "what if I should lose him?" The boy was flushed—but sleeping peacefully. Pale Peter made haste to find out. "Oh, he's all right," Pale Peter thought. "I—I—I guess I'm—a little bit out of sorts myself." He went back to the bar; but he could not rid himself of the fear that haunted him—nor could he be rid of the insistent question —

"*Good God! What if I should lose him?*"

XXIX

A MIRACLE AT PALE PETER'S

IT blew high and ghastly cold on Wednesday. Pale Peter's Donald was within doors all that day. He was somewhat recovered, now, it seemed, from the feverish state of his arrival from the Cant-hook cutting. The wind was in the northwest—wildly blowing and compassionless. It came swishing over the pines and raised a whirling dust of frosty snow in the clearing of Swamp's End. It rattled the windows of Pale Peter's place; it fairly took the ramshackle long building in both hands and by the throat and shook the teeth of it where it stood. There was a hazy moon after the early night. Snow came presently: a cloud of hard flakes, pointed like a hundred needles. They had a roaring fire in the bar. The lamps were all trimmed, too, and turned high. It was light and warm. Warm, yellow light filled the big room, and, where the red curtains were drawn apart, fell invitingly through the frosted windows into the storm. The bar was crowded and uproarious. A roistering fellowship! Colton's crew was in from the Kettle Camps—paid off and spending. Pale Peter said that no man must be turned out-of-doors that night—not so much as a penniless man.

"Let 'em sleep where they fall," said he, in the generous way for which he was praised in the woods. "Put 'em in the snake-room. Full? Well, if they get in the way haul 'em back from the bar. Anyhow," said he, "nobody's going to be turned out of *my* place on a night like this."

Off went Pale Peter—not in the best of humour, it seemed—to his little office at the end of the bar, there to read and smoke.

When John Fairmeadow entered the office, fresh from the trail, he threw off his pack and greatcoat with the air of a man who had come a long road in haste and anxiety.

"I'm tired," said he.

"Come far, Jack?" the saloon-keeper asked.

"No, Peter," the parson sighed; "only from Three Forks. I preached there after supper."

"From *where?*" Pale Peter ejaculated.

"Three Forks, Peter."

Pale Peter, his brows fallen in a pitying frown, stared at the ash of his cigar. "Jack," said he, looking up reproachfully, "what did you do a fool thing like that for on a night like this?"

"I'm on the job, Peter."

"On a night like this!"

"I'm on the job, Peter."

"Is Billy the Beast the man you're after, Jack?"

The parson laughed a little. "Billy the Beast," he sighed, "is the man. He's coming out from the Cant-hook to-night. Nine o'clock, he said. I'm to meet him here. He's going home to-night, Peter. He's going home—going home, Peter, on the late east-bound."

"Going home?" Pale Peter scoffed.

"Going home," said the parson.

"Tsch, tsch, tsch!" went Pale Peter, his face all screwed with pain and pity in the parson's behalf. "Don't you know any better than that, Jack?"

"He's going home," John Fairmeadow resolutely repeated.

Donald came in.

"Hello, boy!" Fairmeadow greeted the lad.

"'Lo, Jack," said the boy. "No sign of him yet. I've been watching."

"He'll come, all right, Donnie."

"Tsch, tsch, tsch!" went Pale Peter.

"I'm tired out," said the parson, sighing again. "I'm all tired out."

He began to hum:

"The Lord's my Shepherd, I'll not want.
He makes me down to lie
In pastures green. He leadeth me
The quiet waters by."

There was a clap of ugly laughter from the bar.

"The Horse Doctor's in from Bottle River, eh?" Fairmeadow commented.

Charlie the Infidel came running down the bar.

"What's yourn, gents?" they heard him say, on the other side of the red curtain.

Down came bottle and glasses.

Fairmeadow softly hummed—accompanied by a rush of the gale—

"My soul He doth restore again;
And me to walk doth make
Within the paths of righteousness,
Ev'n for His own Name's sake."

Three men were mouthing ribaldry beyond the curtain.

Donald moved away.

"Too much for you, Donnie?" the parson inquired, looking up.

The boy flushed.

"Decent little cuss!" Pale Peter muttered, fondly, his eyes glistening with affection.

"Peter," the parson began, angrily, "if you weren't——"

"Go ahead, Jack."

"If you weren't such a detestable beast," Fairmeadow exploded, "you might be——

But, pshaw!" he broke off; "we've gone over all that before."

Pale Peter smiled.

The parson went to humming again:

> "Yea, though I walk in Death's dark vale,
> Yet will I fear none ill:
> For Thou art with me; and Thy rod
> And staff me comfort still."

"Billy the Beast!" Pale Peter muttered. "All damned foolishness!"

"And due now," said Fairmeadow.

"Small hope for the brute!" Peter growled.

"Peter," said Fairmeadow, presently, "I'm going to pray."

Pale Peter jumped out of his chair.

"You won't mind, will you?" Fairmeadow apologized. "It won't do any harm."

"Pray!" Pale Peter gasped. "Here?"

There was the beginning of a brawl in the bar: a blow had been struck.

"I won't be a minute," said Fairmeadow.

"*What!*" the outraged saloon-keeper ejaculated.

"Just a minute or two," Fairmeadow explained. "I can't very well go away, Peter," he added; "and I want to ask God once more—just once more—to let Billy the Beast go home clean. I think He'll do it, Peter. I think He's going to do it—this time. Billy the Beast, you see, has been praying, too."

There was a howl of execration from the bar. The brawl was on in earnest. The howl had followed the sound of a brutal blow.

Charlie the Infidel roared for order.

"For God's sake, Jack," Pale Peter implored, "don't do that thing *here!*"

Fairmeadow knelt.

"Get up, you fool!" Pale Peter cried, in a passion.

There was an outburst of laughter in the bar. It was all mixed with wild oaths and cries for room.

"Jack!"

Fairmeadow prayed on—his gentle face lifted. He was much troubled in spirit, it seemed.

"Don't, Jack!" Pale Peter pleaded. "Don't do that here. I can't stand it. Go outside and do it."

Pale Peter shook the oblivious parson by the shoulder.

The sounds from beyond the red curtain indicated that Charlie the Infidel had bounded over the bar and was striking out in the thick of the scuffle.

"Get up!" Pale Peter begged.

The bar roared in anger for fair play

"Somebody'll see you, you fool!" Pale Peter raged.

Fairmeadow rose.

"What did you want to do a thing like that for?" Peter demanded.

"What's the matter?" the dumbfounded Fairmeadow replied.

"Matter?" Pale Peter scolded. "Have you lost your sense of decency? Doing a thing like that—*here!*"

"Why not, Peter?"

"For shame!"

"It's a good place, Peter. Why not do it here? And I feel better ——"

Donald, who had been peeking in upon the barroom affray, suddenly withdrew from the red curtain, and whispered:

"Here's your man, Jack!"

"God help him!" said the parson.

Pale Peter made haste to the bar to put an end to the brawl.

Pale Peter's bar was then no mild and churchly place—no tender refuge from the snowy night for a man in trouble of his soul. It was filled with smoke and sweaty steam, and with the hot, nauseating breath of liquor. It was foully hot—the air all stale and evil. There was blasphemous tumult, too—oaths and maudlin sobs, growling imprecations, the coughing and spitting of the hurt, roars for whiskey, ribald songs, and the loud, vacant laughter of men gone far in drink. The drunken sleepers, helpless among the moving feet, were mercilessly trampled in the confusion. Their faces were stepped on and spurned. The fight had fallen to the floor. Red McDonald and Cookee Charlie from the Kettle Camps—at each other's throats like dogs—were kicked and trampled and forgotten, sprawling in the thick of the struggling crowd above. A man came spinning from the crowd and began to cough and to spit out his teeth. Another was flinging the blood from his nose and beard. Both laughed—a gleeful bellow. Little Tommy Bagg, a boy of Colton's crew, who had been thrown against the red stove, nursed a sizzling wound in a corner: the pain had sobered the child; he was crying bitterly. And into the press went Pale Peter. He struck with the bartender—hard and promiscuously. Both roared, of course, all the time. And presently (as these affairs will) the fighting abated, halted, dissolved in laughter and a drunken mutual admiration; and there was a loud lining-up at the bar. The long, sweating, bloody, open-mouthed, hairy line, staggering and pushing, beat on the bar like a pack of larking schoolboys, yelling for liquor in rhythm with the drumming.

Billy the Beast came in—all snow and icicles. It had come to Swamp's End from the Canthook cutting that he was gone mad: he had been caught praying (they said); but he was chiefly engaged in blaspheming God from the new-made stumps of the works, and was bound out to Swamp's End on Wednesday night with two hundred dollars in his pocket to raise hell. Camp Three had awaited a heavenly visitation of calamity in castigation of the Beast's sins. It seemed, now, however, that Billy the Beast must be desperately ill: he licked his dry lips like the sick, and his eyes, all fevered and red, had gone far back in his head. He was ghastly to look upon: gone white and lean and shaking. From the noise and pawing of his welcome he seemed to be detached. As he went elbowing towards the bar he was like a soul drawn unwillingly apart from the merry license of the place and standing all alone. An ague shook him; he stumbled, his great hulk reeled. He coughed and shivered with disgust. This spent, he went on again, with a sheepish sort of grin and a sheepish wipe of his icy beard. When he was got a little beyond the hanging-lamp—a reflector threw down a shower of yellow light—his eyes, uneasy and glittering, seemed to be withdrawn to their deepest places. They were like flashes of fire in a pool of shadows. One could not forget his eyes—the blood-red colour, the dry sparkle, the uneasy shifting of them. And he was licking his lips all the time. A dry tongue was forever slipping into his thawing moustache to gather moisture for dry lips.

Billy the Beast came to the bar when the press had drunk and in some part withdrawn.

"What's yourn, Billy?"

"Mine, Charlie?" Billy drawled. He sighed sharply—and then absently wiped his mouth.

Charlie leaned over, alert and hurried.

Billy picked an icicle from his beard. "I don't know as I just quite know, Charlie," said he, in a gentle contemplation of the problem. He thoughtfully dropped the icicle. "Ye see," he sighed, "I haven't made up my mind yet just quite what I *will* begin on."

By the end of this Charlie was elsewhere.

"I reckon," Billy drawled, when Charlie had bounded back for his order, "that it might 's well as not be gin." He sighed again. "Gin, I reckon," he repeated, softly, "t' begin on."

Down went the white bottle on the bar.

"Well, no," said Billy, in some mild agitation of doubt; "no, Charlie. A whiskey," he reconsidered. "A ver-ree sma-a-a-al glass o' whiskey."

"Whiskey, Billy?"

"Well, I reckon," Billy drawled. "A lee-ee-eetle drop o' whiskey."

The Infidel reached for the bottle.

"Stand back there, boys!" John Fairmeadow shouted from the threshold. He came bustling in. And he was in no trance of prayer and adoration, now, you may believe, but in palpitating indignation, and with a living and belligerent intention. "Stand back!" he roared. "Stand back from the bar! Back to the wall, boys! Give this man a show, won't you?" They gave John Fairmeadow himself a roaring welcome, of course. It was the custom. But he would have none of it. "Stand back!" he kept crying, at the top of his big voice. "Get back to the wall! Give this man a show! God knows, he'll need it!" The good-natured, roistering crowd, nosing a fight of some mysterious description, fell away from the bar in boisterous excitement. It was the custom, nowadays, at any rate, to be obedient to John Fairmeadow's whims. Presently there was a wide semicircle, within which lay four snoring sots from the Kettle Camps, but was no other man, except one man. In the focus, Billy the Beast leaned nervously against the bar, with Charlie the Infidel broadly expectant behind. The parson, a thorough showman, it seemed—now in a sweating flush of anxiety—still beat the crowd to the wall. "If you can't see, boys," he shouted, "stand on the chairs. Everybody 'll be able to see if you just keep back. Now, for God's sake, boys," he concluded, "give us a show! Stay right where you are—*and keep quiet*."

The parson lifted his hand. Silence obediently came.

"How—h-h-how ye *been*, parson?" Billy the Beast stuttered. His voice rang conspicuous. It alarmed him. He fidgeted and grinned in stage-fright. "Ye been—ye been—sort o' *perky*, eh?"

The parson slapped a silver dollar on the bar.

"What's yourn?" said Charlie, with a vastly humorous wink.

A general laugh was stifled.

"Charlie," said the parson, gravely, indicating Billy the Beast in a contemptuous wave and with a contemptuous jerk of the head, "give this man a drink of whiskey."

The bartender expostulated.

"That's all right, Charlie," Fairmeadow replied. "Give this man a drink of whiskey."

There was a murmur of expostulation from the crowd of lumber-jacks against the wall. Here, surely, was no proper employment for a minister!

"That's all right, boys," Fairmeadow insisted.

Billy the Beast began to stutter expostulation.

"Give this man a drink of whiskey!" Fairmeadow roared.

Charlie put down bottle and glass.

"Now," said the parson, looking directly into the red eyes of the Beast, "drink it if you're able. And may God Almighty have mercy on your soul!"

The room was breathless.

Billy the Beast thoughtfully poured out the red liquor.

"You can't drink it!" said the desperate parson.

Billy lifted the glass.

"You're not able!" the parson taunted.

Billy stepped away from the bar with the liquor in his hand. He smelled of it—smacked his lips in pretense of delight—held it high and triumphantly—spoke a blasphemous toast, every evil syllable of which was loud as thunder in that quiet room. Nobody smiled. He whistled a jaunty bar or two. He did a step—a careless little shuffle with a coquettish flirt of the foot for period. But nobody laughed. It was disquieting. He began to sing; it was a low ribaldry, mixed with black profanity, for which he was famous. Nobody encouraged him. He sang a bit, shuffled a bit, stared about, grinning, and put the glass to his nose. Meantime he had gone pale and weak. He fell back to the bar, in a moment, and put down the glass, but held it tight, all the time, in his right hand. Once he raised it. His hand halted in mid-air; and he laughed vacantly—and once more put down the glass. It rang on the bar as if his arm had fallen. Liquor splashed out; but Billy held the glass in a close grip. And he glanced, then, like a beaten dog, towards John Fairmeadow. It was a terrified entreaty for mercy.

"Boys," Fairmeadow exclaimed, triumphantly, "he can't drink it!"

Nor could he.

"My God, boys!" Billy the Beast whimpered, breaking in upon the silence, "I can't lift my arm." He was staring horrified at his right hand. "I can't lift it!" he moaned. "*My God, boys, I can't lift my own arm!*"

There was an uproar of profane ejaculation.

"What's the matter with me, boys?" Billy whimpered. "Why can't I lift my own arm?"

The room was still.

"Ain't nobody goin' t' help me?" Billy complained.

Nobody moved.

"Ain't I got no friends here?" Billy the Beast lifted up his face. It may be he fancied that the ceiling opened to his appealing gaze. He raised his left hand beseechingly. "God, be merciful to me, a sinner!" he whispered. He waited. "God, be merciful to me, a sinner!" he repeated.

Then in Pale Peter's barroom a miracle was worked.

Pale Peter slipped an arm around his son. Donald caught his hand. "Look, look!" said Peter. The boy saw it. They all saw it. The change was not instantaneous. There was a momentary interval through which it progressed.

A hand might have gone over the man from head to foot. Of course they saw no miraculous fingers touch him: they had no vision at all—nor any feeling of a strange spiritual Presence. But what was bestial vanished from the Beast's countenance. They beheld a new face. They had not been more amazed to see the rags he wore lying in a heap with the shrivelled horror of his old personality on Pale Peter's barroom floor. He remained a moment in a daze of bewilderment. "Boys," he muttered, "something's happened to me. What's the matter?" He laughed then; and the laugh was so charged with youth and joy—so like a boy's clean glee—that he laughed again, as though to delight in the exercise. "I'm saved, boys," said he. "Yes, I am, boys. Why, boys, I'm—I'm—I'm saved. That's what's the matter with me. I've been—I've been—born again. I'm clean. This is what I've wanted t' be. This is what I've prayed for all this winter. I'm clean, I tell ye—I'm clean!" He suffered, now, some agitation—some hysteria of joy, perhaps. Presently his eye fell on the glass of liquor in his hand. He stared at it in comical amazement (which, however, did not move any one to laughter). "Why," he exclaimed, heartily, "I don't want *this!*" and pushed it away with a light laugh.

They observed that he had forgotten the paralysis of his arm.

"I'm just as hungry as I can be," said he. "I say, old man"—to the parson—"what time is it?"

Fairmeadow warned him.

"Pshaw!" said Billy, boyishly. "Wish I could have a snack. I never *was* so hungry. But come on, old man," he went on, anxiously, "or we'll lose that train. So long, boys!" he called to the gaping crowd. "I'm sorry I can't stay. But, ye see, I'm goin' home. Good-bye, boys. I'll see ye again soon. Good-bye. God bless ye, every one!" He paused on the threshold to wave his hand. "Ye see," said he, his face shining, "there's a dear little woman there, an' she's sent for me, an'—an'—I jus' *got* t' go!"

Fairmeadow and the Beast went out together.

"Boys," said Pale Peter, breaking the dumbfounded silence, "the drinks are on the house!"

There was a rush for the bar.

XXX

THE END OF THE GAME

WHEN Billy the Beast, in the keeping of John Fairmeadow, vanished forever from the bar of the Red Elephant in this extraordinary fashion, Pale Peter, followed by Donald, passed astounded into the easy-chaired little office, and there, having drawn the red curtains, comfortably disposed his well-groomed person and fell to brooding.

"You lose, pop," the boy laughed.

Pale Peter looked up with a start. "Lose, Donnie?" he asked.

"Sure, you lose!"

"Lose what?"

"We licked you, pop, didn't we?"

"Oh, I see!" Pale Peter returned, relieved. "Yes, of course; you licked me, didn't you?" He snipped the end from his cigar and absently struck a match. "I was thinking about something else," he added. "I was thinking about losing—something else. You're pleased, aren't you, son? Eh? Pleased, aren't you?"—and here a note of melancholy crept into Pale Peter's voice—"to lick your old dad."

The boy nodded delightedly.

"Is it so pleasant," Pale Peter asked, hurt to the quick by Donald's elation, "to whip your father?"

"Oh, no; not that!"

"Not that?" Pale Peter asked, with a troubled smile.

"No, pop; but I'm glad that Billy the Beast has gone home."

Pale Peter looked away. "You're happy, aren't you?" said he, gently. "I'm glad," he sighed.

"You don't mind, do you?" Donald asked, quickly. "You don't mind, do you, pop?'

"Not at all."

"You're not put out, are you, because—I crowed?"

"Not at all."

"You couldn't be, could you, pop?" Donald went on, still unconvinced of his father's approbation.

"Not at all, Donnie."

"Oh, you *couldn't* be!" said Donnie, in distress.

"Not at all."

Donald fixed his eyes on his father in grave and troubled doubt. He, too, sighed. The victory of Billy the Beast, after all, had a bitter taste to the boy. It savoured too strongly of his father's defeat.

"Not at all," Pale Peter repeated.

It was still blowing high; and at this moment a blast of the big gale brought down from the Swamp's End station the whistle of the departing east-bound.

"There he goes!" said Donnie.

"That's good," said Pale Peter. "I'm glad of it, son—if you are."

Donnie caught at one of John Fairmeadow's ejaculations.

"Thank God, he's gone!" said he.

"I reckon," Pale Peter gravely observed, "that Almighty God had a good deal to do with it."

Silence fell between the two. Donald restlessly felt that he had in some way incurred his father's displeasure. But why? *why?* Did his father's business call so implacably for the destruction of men? The boy wearily dismissed this old, clamouring question, which had troubled him enough, God knows! in these last years. He shook his head in dismissal of the puzzle—and sighed heavily. And as for Pale Peter—Pale Peter was deeply disturbed. Pale Peter was not troubled, to be sure, by the uproar in the bar; nor did the departure of Billy the Beast concern him very much. He was glad, indeed, that Billy the Beast had gone: for a point of difference between himself and his son had gone with that erring lumber-jack; and Pale

Peter was wise enough to know that a point of such sharp difference would speedily have multiplied itself. What disturbed Pale Peter was the insistent, haunting question: *My God, what if I should lose him?* The question had asked itself again and again since Donnie had gone to bed the night before. It was forever demanding an answer of Pale Peter's unwilling heart. *What if I should lose him? What if I should lose him?* And now, while Pale Peter narrowly watched his son, he observed much to give him grave concern. The boy was flushed and restless: he flung himself about in his chair, wretchedly uneasy; his eyes were dry and dull, he laughed and sighed in the same breath, and his tongue began to wag with the rapidity and incoherency of fever. But the boy was only overwrought, Pale Peter fancied: the boy was only a little overwrought, and would be better in the morning. Again: *What if I should lose him? What if I should lose him?* Pale Peter, detached from the conversation by his anxiety—answering in monosyllables the boy's excited chatter—watching, watching, all the time—brooding, accusing himself, deliberating—Pale Peter made up his mind to be gone with the lad from Swamp's End without delay. They would be gone together. Swamp's End would know them no more. It would presently be as though Swamp's End and the bar of the Red Elephant had never been at all; and life, then, would surely be happier for them both.

But —

What if I should lose him?

"Donnie," said Pale Peter, abruptly, "would you like to go away?"

"With you?"

Pale Peter's wound was eased by the eager question. "Yes," said he, smiling; "with me, of course."

"For good?"

Pale Peter was hurt again. The question had come instantly. For good? It had come in a rush of eager hope. The man frowned. Donald had betrayed too much. "You're tired of this, aren't you?" Pale Peter asked. He laughed a little. He sighed, then—and sighed again. "Awfully tired—of this—aren't you, old man?"

"Of what, father?"

"Oh," Pale Peter replied, wearily, with a gesture to include the whole of Swamp's End, from the tumultuous bar to the white edge of the woods, "of all this: of the whole thing. You're pretty sick of it, aren't you?"

"Of the Red Elephant?"

Again Pale Peter was wounded. The question smacked of too large an eagerness to be rid of it all. "Yes, boy," he answered. "Aren't you tired of the bar and the bottles and the bestiality of the whole bally business?"

Donald's eyes sparkled.

"Aren't you tired of it all, son?"

"I am, pop," Donald answered, gravely regarding his father, "if you are."

"I'm tired of it," Pale Peter sighed. "You've made me tired of it," he went on. "You see, I want to be on the same side with you, Donnie. Don't you see? I don't want to lose you. I—I don't want to lose you—in any way at all. I want to be with you—not against you. You're tired of this, aren't you? I can see that, old man. You're awfully tired of it. I didn't know—before—how tired of it you were. Well, so am I, then. Let's get out of it. We'll get rid of it, Donnie, and go away. We're all alone in the world, son. There's just you and me left—since your mama died. Just you and me, Donnie—just you and me. Let's hang together. What's the use of having differences? You and I shouldn't have differences. And we'll have them sure—if we stay here. I thought I'd stay a little longer—thought I'd stay here until I made a little more—thought I'd keep on, Donnie, just as long as—well, boy, until you ——" Pale Peter's words failed. He stopped. The truth of it was in his mind: that he had hoped to continue with the Red Elephant until Donald had grown old enough to suspect—merely to suspect—the real character of the business conducted over the bar of the Red Elephant; but it was evident, now, that the boy was older than Pale Peter had thought, and the man stopped, ashamed and alarmed.

Donald said nothing.

"Of course," Pale Peter went on, pitifully, "the business is all right. It's all right, of course; but if you're tired of it, Donnie ——"

"Pop," Donald interrupted, "you're not fooling me."

Pale Peter started. "No?" said he.

"No, pop."

There was a pause.

"I—I—haven't—fooled you, Donnie?"

"You haven't fooled me, pop," Donald went on, earnestly, "for a long time."

"What do you mean, son?"

"You haven't fooled me—about the business—being all right."

Pale Peter flushed. "How long," he asked, quietly, "have you—have you—felt this way?"

"A long, long time."

"I see," said Pale Peter, his flush of shame mounting higher. "Since Jack came?"

"Jack didn't tell me, father. I knew it before he came."

Pale Peter laughed sadly "You might have told me, Donald," said he. "It would have been better—had you told me. You see, you've—you've—let me lie a good deal to you."

"Oh, no, father!"

"A good deal, son—a good deal."

For a long time Pale Peter sat musing in his easy chair. The gale blew high: it came sweeping down the street, it clamoured at the black window, it shook the Red Elephant to its foundations. Pale Peter did not hear. The man brooded upon his shame, and was broken by it. Presently he looked up.

"You're ashamed of me, aren't you?" he asked, with a wan smile.

"Why?" Donald cried. "Why should I be ashamed of you?"

"The business, Donnie—and the lies."

"I'm *not* ashamed!"

"No? Not ashamed? You've not lost all respect for me?"

"No, no!"

"Why not, Donald?"

"I don't know what you mean," Donald sobbed; "but I haven't lost respect for you—oh, no—I haven't!"

"You're a good son, Donnie," said Pale Peter, his eyes glistening. "You're a loyal little fellow. We'll begin all over again—you and me together. We'll not trouble about this any more at all. We'll forget. We'll forget the business and—and—the lies. The business *isn't* all right. No, no! You know it, Donnie. And so we'll quit it—and go away together. We'll go away from Swamp's End. And some day, son, you will respect your father, I am sure, once again."

"I respect you *now*," the boy protested, sobbing. "I've *always* respected you!"

Pale Peter sighed.

Near midnight, Pale Peter, in anxious concern, tiptoed into the boy's bedroom, to make sure that he was comfortably stowed away for the night. Donald was not asleep. "That you, pop?" he muttered. "I'm so glad you've come. You won't go away, will you? I'm sick—somehow, I'm just sick all over. My head aches—and I want a drink of water—and I can't lie still—and I'm sick." Pale Peter bade the lad be comforted. *What if I should lose him?* The man's heart began to ache. It was all too obvious that Donald was gravely ill. "I'll sit with you, son, until you go to sleep," said he; "and I'll send for Jack, too, right away, old man, and we'll sit with you together, Jack Fairmeadow and I—until you go to sleep. Don't you be afraid, old man. Jack Fairmeadow and I will take care of *you*." Pale Peter was become all at once—and strangely so—most tender in his ministrations. And not awkwardly so. He smoothed the pillows, he straightened the coverlets, he eased the lad's lying and softened a cooler place for his head, he ran on with his talk in a crooning, comforting way, as though he had been used to it all his life. "That's all right," said he. "*We'll* fix *you*. We'll have the doctor here in the morning to attend to *you*. And we'll go away, too, old man—we'll get out of here—just as soon as you're well. *You'll* be all right, boy. Easier now, aren't you? Lie still, kid. Can't you—won't you—just lie still, old fellow?"

"I can't, pop."

"Can't lie still?"

"No, pop. I *can't* lie still. I would if I could; but—but—I'm so sick—that I just *can't*. What time is it, pop? Near time to get up?"

"Not yet, old man."

"Hang it! I *want* to get up."

"Lie still, boy."

"I can't—I *can't* lie still."

Pale Peter did the work all over again. He straightened the coverlets, he smoothed the pillows, he eased the lad's lying, and made a cool, smooth place for his head. "There!" said he. "That's better, old fellow! Would you mind, old man, if I went away, just for a minute?"

"Don't go away, pop," Donnie pleaded.

"Just for a minute."

"I don't want to be left alone."

"Just for a minute, boy."

"What's that noise, pop?"

"Just the gale, old fellow. It's blowing high to-night."

"You're not fooling me, pop."

Pale Peter paused in trouble.

"They're fighting in the bar," Donnie sighed.

"Son," said Pale Peter, moving towards the door, "I'll be back in a moment."

"Don't go."

"Just a moment, Donnie!"

"Please don't go!"

"I want to close the bar, Donnie," Peter pleaded. "I've *got* to close the bar!"

Donnie sat bolt upright in bed. "I'll lie still," he promised. "I'll lie still until you come back."

It did not take long to close the bar. A sharp word to Charlie the Infidel put an end to the thriving trade; and a word or two to the big-hearted lumber-jacks sent them tiptoeing out of the Red Elephant and across the street to continue the conviviality at the Café of Egyptian Delights. Half a dozen or more remained to help Charlie and Dennie the Hump carry off to the same shelter all the stupefied fellows on the floor and in the snake-room. The Red Elephant was presently deserted—and for the first time in its history. In the meantime Pale Peter had summoned John Fairmeadow and by telephone spoken hurriedly with Dr. Ralston of Big Rapids. Donnie was sick. Some sort of a fever, apparently, was the matter with him. Had he been at Big Rapids recently? Yes: Pale Peter had taken him to the Saloon-keepers' Convention at Big Rapids. But why the question? Typhoid was epidemic at Big Rapids; and typhoid was doubtless the matter with Donnie. Dr. Ralston would be over on the morning train. No, no! Dr. Ralston must come at once. The slow freight had just gone by Swamp's End. He must halt the slow freight; he must make immediate arrangements by telegraph for the engine. There must be no regard for expense. Never mind expense. Dr. Ralston must come at once. And Dr. Ralston must bring two nurses from the Sisters' Hospital; and Dr. Ralston must wire Appleworthy of the Capital to meet him at Swamp's End for consultation; and Dr. Ralston must arrange the immediate departure for Swamp's End of the most eminent Chicago specialist in children's diseases. Pale Peter would hold Dr. Ralston to account. There must be no failure; and there must be no delay.

Whereupon Pale Peter went quickly to the bar. "Put out the lights," said he.

Out went the lights.

"It's over," said Peter; "it's all over. Lock the door. Where's the key?"

The bolt was shot with a snap.

"That's the end," said Pale Peter.

Up-stairs Donnie was still restless. "I can't lie still," he complained, when his father entered. "I tried—but I can't."

"The bar's closed, boy."

"Is it locked, pop?"

"For good, Donnie."

"Where's the key?"

Pale Peter gave the key to the boy; and Donnie slipped it under his pillow. He seemed, then, to lie easier, for a time; but when Fairmeadow presently arrived he was again restlessly stirring.

"I can't lie still, Jack," he explained, with a wry smile.

"Going to be sick, Donnie?"

"Oh, no!" said Donnie, quickly. "I'm not the least bit sick; but I somehow can't lie still."

Fairmeadow felt the fever in the boy's forehead.

"Hang it all!" Donnie exclaimed. "I wish I could keep my legs still!"

This was addressed to Fairmeadow; but presently after that Donnie seemed no longer to realize the presence of his father and the minister in the room. He talked with shadows—babbled to the Past and the Future. In this growing delirium he spoke often of going away from Swamp's End. "We're going away," he said. "I tell you we're going to stop this. We're not going to do this any longer. We're sick and tired of it, I tell you, and we're going to quit."

There was much of this. It ran on through the night. And the boy often ran a hand weakly under his pillow to touch the key. "I got it," said he. "The bar's locked—and I got the key." It seemed to Fairmeadow—who sat listening with Pale Peter in the dim-lit room—that the boy fancied himself in the midst of an accusing throng. "I tell you," Donnie protested, "we're not going to do it any longer. We're going to quit. We're going away. Don't you believe me? I tell you, we're not going to do this any longer."

"John!" Pale Peter whispered.

Fairmeadow started.

"What does he mean?" said Pale Peter. "Why does he always say 'We'?"

Fairmeadow shook his head.

"I don't like it," Pale Peter went on. "I can't stand it. *He* hadn't anything to do with the business. It hasn't been *his* fault. *He's* innocent enough. Do you think he—feels—that—he was in it, too?"

"It is the way of a boy," Fairmeadow answered.

"Do you think, Jack," Peter stammered, "that he—feels—the *guilt* of it?"

Fairmeadow shrugged his shoulders.

"Good God!" exclaimed Pale Peter, starting up. "All these years!"

"All these years!" Fairmeadow echoed.

"Tell me, Jack—is it *true?*"

Fairmeadow would not answer.

"It's true!" Pale Peter groaned. "It's true! It's true! Poor little kid!"

Donnie started up in bed. He seemed once more, Fairmeadow fancied, to be facing an accusing throng. "My pop's a good man!" he declared. "I tell you, I'm proud of my pop!"

Nothing availed: the end came soon. Neither Dr. Ralston of Big Rapids nor the great Appleworthy and the eminent Chicago specialist could alter the natural decree. No expense was spared, you may be sure; but Pale Peter's money, amassed for him by the labour of a thousand men in the woods, betrayed its accustomed powerlessness. Within the week Gray Billy Batch and Mag's little baby had other company in the secluded field at the edge of the woods. *The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away,* read John Fairmeadow; *blessed be the name of the Lord.* And, *I heard a voice from heaven saying unto me, Write, From henceforth blessed are the dead who die in the Lord: even so saith the Spirit; for they rest from their labours.* What comfort Pale Peter drew from these consoling words, I do not know. Not much, I fancy. He said nothing: he gave no sign. What he suffered on that wintry day he kept to himself. He uttered no word of sorrow; he asked for no relief. But when he and John Fairmeadow came once more to the Red Elephant, he drew the big minister in. It was cold in the little office: there was no fire in the deserted bar. It was dim, too: the curtains were drawn. For a long time the two men sat silent together. Pale Peter smoked heavily. Except for this he did not move. No sound came from the shuttered bar: no clink of glass, no rattle of coin, no convivial voice. It was very still and desolate in the little office. It was lonely. There had come an end. It was lonely there—it was lonely everywhere.

"Jack!" said Pale Peter, looking up.

"Yes, Peter?"

"Do you want this place?"

"Yes."

"You may have it."

"Thank you, Peter. Thank you, old man. I'll be glad to have the place."

"Don't thank me, Jack. Thank—him."

"I thank—him."

Pale Peter gripped the arms of his chair. Fairmeadow looked away. Pale Peter was composed when the minister's wet glance returned.

"Jack," said he, "what you going to do with it?"

"It shall be the Donald Memorial Institute."

"Yes," said Peter; "that's right, Jack. I thought—of pleasing—him—that way. You'll need an endowment, too, Jack. You shall have it. I've made money, Jack. You shall have it all. And Jack!"

"Yes?"

"I'm going to ask you a foolish question, Jack. Do you think that—this will square him—where he's gone? No, no! I don't mean that. But won't it ease him, Jack? For God's sake, tell me! Won't it ease that sense of guilt he had? Poor little kid! Poor little kid!"

Pale Peter had broken down.

XXXI

IN HIS OWN BEHALF

SWAMP'S END was amazed, of course, when it all came out; but not for long: for it seemed to Swamp's End, after all—and to Bottle River, to the Cant-hook, and to the boys of the Yellow Tail, too—that Pale Peter's course had been reasonable enough. Swamp's End observed with solicitous interest the swift conversion of the Red Elephant into the Donald Memorial: nor was Swamp's End cynical in respect to the outcome, but, rather, watched the progress of the affair in curious and hopeful expectancy. Swamp's End regretted, to be sure, and conceived it a sinful waste, when news of a certain deed in the night went abroad. It was held that to broach casks of good liquor—to shatter bottles—to spill the last drop in the cellar—was quite unnecessary to the accomplishment of Pale Peter's admirable purpose: that though good liquor had no proper place within the four walls of the Donald Memorial there were other ways of disposing of it. Why waste? Why not rather celebrate? Why not call the boys from the woods and initiate the undertaking in the traditional way? Wouldn't the boys come? To be sure, the boys would come! Gladly, generously, too; and John Fairmeadow might pray as much as he liked. A little conviviality need not interfere with the religious exercises. It never had before. In these strange circumstances, moreover, it might help: the boys would feel more at home in the new surroundings. Aside from this small criticism, however, the project met with the approval of the woods; and when the paper-hangers had returned to Big Rapids, and when a car-load of new furniture from the East had been installed, and when the lamps were lighted once more in the transformed bar, and when the warm glow fell again from the red-curtained windows into the night, Swamp's End met the new proprietor at the threshold, and warmly shook his hand, and grinned, and having inspected the comfortable place heartily "reckoned" that "she'd do."

By this time, however, Pale Peter was gone. There had come a blustering night. The late east-bound, plastered with driven snow, puffed into the station, and stood still, breathing heavily.

"Good-bye, Jack!" said Pale Peter.

"Peter," John Fairmeadow earnestly returned, "won't you stay?"

"No need of me, old man. Everything's fixed. You're in full and legally determined possession of the old place. That's all I care about. Good-bye!"

"Peter ——"

"Good-bye!"

"Won't you stay, old man, and help?"

"No, no, Jack! I reckon you don't need a man like me. And you know, Jack, you have a little partner remaining. You'll stand by, I know. You'll stand by—him."

"I'll stand by, Peter."

"Good-bye!"

"Good-bye, old man! God bless you!"

So passed Pale Peter from Swamp's End: nor was he ever heard of again. But the little partner remained: the little partner remained in the spirit to bless the woods and to inspire the shepherd of its erring souls.

There came presently to John Fairmeadow, busy and distracted, a politely phrased and cautious invitation to address the Superior Body—briefly to address the Superior Body—in relation to his ministerial activities in the lumber woods. John Fairmeadow was assured that the Superior Body was "back" of him in his "labour for the Lord"—that the Superior Body not only respected but prayed for him—that the brethren would be delighted to receive him—to listen to him—briefly, of course—and that the brethren would doubtless be pleased to carry to their congregations news of his *most* interesting and peculiar work, to the end that some small sums might be raised to assist it. Wherefore John Fairmeadow was urged to make an "impression"—to "hit the bull's-eye," now that he had the chance—to "strike while the iron was hot." He was indulgently warned, moreover, that the brethren were busy men; and he was "tipped off" in this connection that brevity would be a telling point in his favour. It was an earnest, interested, wholly agreeable letter, and John Fairmeadow was delighted with it. "Now," thought he, "that's *mighty* kind in the boys. It isn't what I expected to speak to them about; but I'll do my best." It will be observed that John Fairmeadow was flattered—flattered to be brought into an accepted relationship with the ordained of his profession. And doubtless John Fairmeadow, having applied his large energy and devotion to the task, would have composed a capital address—would both have "hit the bull's-eye" and "struck while the iron was hot"—had not Long Butcher Long, one of his parishioners, developed *delirium tremens*, at that inopportune moment, and needed the closest sort of attention. Worse than that, John Fairmeadow was late: the Superior Body was already in session.

When Fairmeadow arrived in the anteroom of the church at the Capital where the Superior

Body was deliberating, his big hand was shaken by a diffident, white-cravated, frock-coated, pale-fingered, spectacled little man, the author of the politely-phrased letter, and welcomed with caution. "We're mighty glad to have you with us, Mr. Fairmeadow," said the little gentleman, his manner conveying a due sense of the honour the Superior Body had conferred upon John Fairmeadow.

"That's all right, old man!" Fairmeadow responded. "I'm glad, too."

The little gentleman peered at John Fairmeadow over his spectacles. "The Superior Body is sorry, of course," said he, "that the outcome of your examination was—unfortunate."

Fairmeadow laughed. "That's all right, old man," he replied. "I'm sorry, too. So are the boys. That's why I am."

"You see, Mr. Fairmeadow," the little gentleman began to stammer, in apology, "we—we have to ——"

"Don't mention it," said Fairmeadow.

The little gentleman was ill at ease. "If I were you, Mr. Fairmeadow," he said, at last, "I shouldn't refer to the matter in my address to the brethren."

"Why not?"

"Well, you see, nothing—would be—accomplished."

"No?" Fairmeadow inquired, amused.

"Nothing whatsoever. The Superior Body has made up its mind. In certain cases, of course, ordination is conferred upon men of—well—of limited theological education; but these are extraordinary cases, and the Superior Body, in discussing your case, has determined, Mr. Fairmeadow, that your usefulness would not be increased by ——"

"Just so!" Fairmeadow interrupted; "but the Superior Body knows nothing about it. In point of fact, my usefulness *would* be increased. My parishioners *want* an ordained minister. They're quite right, too. And for that reason I have sought ——"

"My dear fellow!"

"Now," Fairmeadow went on, "I'd like to tell the boys in there ——"

"My dear fellow! Don't *think* of such a thing. Take my advice. Let the matter drop. The Superior Body has had a full and free discussion of the standard of theological training it should demand of *all* applicants for ordination ——"

"Theological training?" Fairmeadow laughed.

"Yes, of course," the little gentleman replied; "and in your case ——"

"I'll tell 'em about mine."

"Theological training? You've had none!"

"Oh, yes, I have, old man!" said Fairmeadow, confidently. "And I'm going to tell the boys in there all about it."

"My dear fellow!"

"That's all right, old man," said Fairmeadow, positively; "but by Jove, I *will!*"

When the chairman's attention was at last distracted from the discussion under way for John Fairmeadow's introduction, he managed to shake hands in a quick, soft way, and to whisper, "Glad you've come. Very busy, just now. Be seated somewhere. I'll call on you in due course." Then he returned on tiptoe to his little table and once more smilingly faced the busy meeting of the black-coated brethren. John Fairmeadow sat down to wait—to look and to listen and to marvel. The debate was prolonged and somewhat acrimonious. I have forgotten what it concerned. It was a point of order, perhaps; or it may have been the congregational squabble at Brown's Corners. I have forgotten. Perhaps it was the progress of missions among the Mohammedans of Southern Arabia. This does not matter, however: it was prolonged, at any rate, and it was slightly acrimonious, so that the chairman must keep a tight rein on the brethren, who were used, at such times, being one family, to loose themselves somewhat from restraint. There were retort and rejoinder in plenty, some of it keen-edged; and there was a good deal of laughter, too. John Fairmeadow fidgeted in his pew. Time was passing; his train was due to leave within the hour; and Long Butcher Long, now reposing in the care of Plain Tom Hitch in the glorified snake-room of the Donald Memorial at Swamp's End, would need John Fairmeadow's more knowing and more powerful attentions that night. So Fairmeadow stared and listened impatiently—and fidgeted in his pew—and wondered how much time a gathering of ordained ministers might waste with an easy conscience—and speculated upon the condition of all the parishioners who went lacking a shepherd in the meantime—and heartily wished "they'd get through." At last, they did, of course; and the bewildered Fairmeadow wondered what the outcome of the discussion had been. It was not surprising: for the matter had "gone over."

In the midst of his effort to solve the riddle, Fairmeadow heard the smiling chairman say —

"A few words from Brother Fairmeadow, reports of whose work among the degraded lumberjacks of our state have interested us so much, and who will *briefly* address us."

Fairmeadow rose, looked composedly around, put his hands in his pockets, squared his shoulders, and audibly sighed. Nobody knows why he sighed: I fancy that Fairmeadow himself had no idea at the time. But the sigh was so deep and frank, you may believe, that it was quite sufficient to procure attention and a curious silence in the church. There had been a good deal of talk about Fairmeadow. From many sources the brethren had learned a good deal about him. There had been a good deal of laughter, too. The examining committee had not failed to tell picturesque tales in the most humorous fashion in the world about the experience with Billy the Beast at Swamp's End. The Superior Body had laughed heartily in the leisure moments of the last session; and the congregations beyond—for the story was far too good to keep, embellished, as it had been, by the ingenuity of the examining committee—had echoed the laughter of the brethren. And Fairmeadow, now standing gravely before them all, clad in the lumber-woods way, still in mackinaw and heavy boots, was a figure good to look upon, if only on account of the admirable contrast he presented. A clean, true man, at work, hard at work, in the world: a big, broad-shouldered, deep-chested, long-legged body, evidently with a soul to match its excellencies, and with a glowing heart and a purpose lifted high. No wonder the brethren attended. It was an occurrence out of the ordinary—*quite* out of the ordinary, believe me. And while the big man in the mackinaw looked gravely roundabout upon them all, seeming to pause to look into the eyes of each, the brethren settled themselves to listen, stirred by an agreeable little thrill of impending excitement.

The chairman repeated, absently —

"Will briefly a-dress-ss us-s."

"Boys," Fairmeadow began, genially, in his big, warm way, "I'm almighty sorry I can't stay very long with you."

A little laughter was provoked.

"You see, boys," Fairmeadow went on, ingenuously, "I'm a busy man, and I've got to get back on the job by the 6:43. Otherwise I'd be glad to talk to you all night."

Somebody called —

"Talk as long as you like!"

"Thanks, old man," Fairmeadow replied. "I'd like to. Really, I would. But ——"

"Go on! Go on!"

Fairmeadow nodded and smiled his acknowledgment of this genuine interest. "What I want to talk to you about," he began, "is something you've been a good deal bothered about, and that's my ordination ——"

"The brother," said the chairman, promptly, "is out of order."

"That's all right, old man," Fairmeadow began, smiling; "but you see ——"

There were loud cries of —

"Let him go on! Go on, brother!"

The chairman bowed acquiescence: the wish of the brethren was evidently unanimous and far too fervent to be opposed.

"Thanks, boys," Fairmeadow responded, quietly. "That's just what I mean to do."

There was a round of applause.

Fairmeadow began at the beginning. "Boys," said he, so gravely that his deep voice thrilled the hearts of every man among them, "I am a redeemed drunkard: in this is my call and education and therein resides my right to ordination." After that the silence was not once broken. The good brethren, sitting in the presence of a man who had suffered the fires of unrighteousness, listened, enthralled, to the story of those other days. There was not a whisper—not a movement. It was all frankly told: the tale of the Bowery saloon, of the park benches, of begging and filth and shivering nights, of hopelessness and of helpless, uttermost degradation. "And at last, boys," Fairmeadow proceeded, "I was kicked out of Solomon's Cellar, and had no place to go. And I got up from a bench in Mulberry Park, boys, and was advised, by two friendly fellows, to go down to Jerry McAuley's mission in Water Street. 'Go down there,' they said, 'and God will help you.' It was raining. It was a cold, wet night in the fall of the year. I was sick, and cold, and on the verge of *delirium tremens;* and I needed a drink—I desperately needed a drink.

They told me the way, I suppose—I have forgotten. And I forget all that happened until I found myself at the door of the mission in Water Street with the definite idea that I had come for a bed-ticket. I had not come for religious consolation, you may be sure—not for spiritual grace. I had come for what I could get out of it—for what a sick drunkard needed—a bed-ticket.

"They were singing. It chanced that they were singing a hymn my mother used to sing when I was a boy at home. I sat down—obscurely. I was drunk. It may be that I had had a drink on the way to Water Street—perhaps two—I do not know. But I was drunk; and I reasoned—benighted reason!—that if I were to get my ticket I must behave myself before all these pious folk. They were singing,

" 'Rock of Ages, cleft for me,
Let me hide myself in Thee . . .'

and it seemed to me that I could hear my mother's voice, that I could see her face, that she was living again, that I was at home again, a boy. . . . You understand? You know the vision that might come to such a man as I—then? . . . Presently they sang again. It chanced—shall I say chanced?—that my mother used to sing that simple hymn, too, when I was a boy at home. It was,

> " 'Jesus, lover of my soul,
> Let me to Thy bosom fly . . .'

and I was overcome. I had loved my mother. I had wronged her, of course; but I had never ceased to love her—never failed, in all those degraded years, to cherish her memory. I had loved her! I drank her to death, God knows it! But I had loved her, God knows—loved her every hour!"

Fairmeadow paused.

"While they sang these simple hymns," he went on, presently resuming, "memory of my mother stirred within me—memory of her, of home, of trees and lawn, of the touch of her hand, her prayers, her kisses, of myself as a lad, of the old aspirations, of baseball, of my bedroom—the little things of home and childhood and of a man's mother—her voice and hands and eyes.

"You know, don't you? . . . Every man, surely, understands. . . ."

The brethren understood.

"I had not thought much of such things for a long time, perhaps," Fairmeadow continued. "I had been concerned with the pursuit of—another drink. Perhaps the old hymns—these awakened memories—exhibited my degradation with conviction to my own soul. I don't know. . . . But when one of the brothers testified I listened. I believed him. It seemed to me that he was telling the story of my life and wretchedness—not of another's—not of his life any more than of mine. I believed him. It was true. I knew that every word was true. I knew—knew intimately—the back room of the Bowery saloon from which he had been ejected. Others testified to redemption through Jesus Christ—to salvation from themselves and every power of evil. And I knew that they did not lie. . . . Some gave thanks for a day's preservation—some for the ease of a week—some for years of joyous, useful life. What they had been was what I was. I knew it. What they had become I could see with my own eyes. They were clean; they were not in rags—they had no thirst. They were men of joy to themselves—of value to the world. . . . And they had no consciousness of guilt. They had peace. . . . And I—I was still a drunken outcast—a sinner in rags, dirty, drunk, shirtless, ill. . . . But they had been what I was. They had not lied when they said so. There was hope, then, for me. You see, these men were the living evidence of that hope. And I learned 'the way of salvation.'"

Again a pause: the chairman leaned forward a little—all the brethren leaned forward—as the climax of this indubitable experience of the soul approached.

"Somebody asked me if I would not give God a chance in my life—a clean, strong, kindly man . . . *who had been what I was*, and whom I *knew* to have been what I was. . . . Did I not care to give God a chance to restore me? Would I not try it? Would I not be prayed for? Would I not pray for myself? . . . I was drunk—still drunk—but I was resolved. I was down and out. I had nothing left. And I went forward to get what these men had—what my soul desired—redemption. It was a logical determination. The evidence of God's activity in the world—of His power and wish to regenerate—had been so convincingly exhibited that no rational intelligence could endure to doubt it. And I was in a position to know the depths from which these men had been lifted . . . and I knew that only the power and love of Almighty God could so lift them up. . . .

"And I got up from my knees a new man—'A new creature in Christ Jesus.' I had been 'born again.' It is not a cant phrase; I used to think so; but now I know—I *know*—it isn't. There are no other words so accurately to describe the change which had occurred within me—no other words to describe the completeness of it, the newness of the life into which I had come, a child in righteous ways. I was regenerated: I had been 'born again.' I was sober. And from that moment I have never wanted alcohol. . . . A miracle—as truly a miracle as any healing ever was! And in every essential a miracle. . . . I have not wanted a drink. Do you apprehend the stupendous change which had occurred within me? *I have not wanted a drink since that time!* . . . I *did* want a bath. Instantly. But I was too dirty to be given one without precautions. And I wanted a clean shirt. I loathed my rags—my dirty person. I wanted to be clean. How I craved a bath! And pride at once revived—the good pride of manhood. One of the brothers—we redeemed drunkards are all brothers—offered me five cents. I rejected it—and with hurt pride. I was no *beggar!* I was a man again—a gentleman! What did I want of *charity?* What did I want of a nickel I hadn't earned? I wanted *work.* First I wanted sleep—I desperately needed a bed—and then I wanted a bath and a job. I had my bath in the morning. What a gracious gift it was! And I got my job, too—and I got my clean shirt."

The crisis was past: there was a ripple of nervous laughter among the brethren, which was instantly stilled as Fairmeadow proceeded.

"But I lay that night in a Bowery lodging-house," he went on. "It was a heaven of rest and ease and quiet and seclusion after Solomon's Cellar. I was too dirty to be put in the long room with the decent Bowery rowdies and drunks. I was given a bunk in a section reserved for—the worst of us. . . . I was very low, you see. . . . But I was too weak to crawl into bed; they must lift me in. I did not sleep. I lay awake all that night—in tears and prayer and joyous aspiration. My tears were of contrition; my prayers were of rejoicing, of incoherent, unutterable gratitude; my aspiration was towards work, and service, and self-respect, and the love of all men. A wonderful night!—a night in which those things which I had once cherished, but had long abandoned, were restored to me: hope, truth, love, pure ambition. The things of St. Paul: 'Whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report: if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise. . . .' It seems to me now that in that night I travelled back over the long way I had come—that I was once more in the company of the pure things of my boyhood. I was a new creature, you see, in Christ Jesus. . . . And in the morning I stumbled rejoicing to the labour of a new day in a new life. . . . And I was sober—and I was not at all afraid. . . ."

It was the end.

"Now, boys," Fairmeadow gravely added, "you know why I am here. You know the meaning of such a life as mine—know its significance in a world of men. You know what my work is, too, and whether or not I am called of God to do it, and whether or not I am an instrument well chosen to serve God's purposes in these woods."

He sat down.

"Brethren," said the chairman, reverently, "let us pray!"

After that they ordained John Fairmeadow on the spot; and Fairmeadow, when he got back to Swamp's End, had much ado to keep the boys from celebrating the event according to the customs established.

XXXII

LOVE AND LABOUR

IT was spring again at Swamp's End. The snow was gone: the trails were dry and greening. Balmy winds came over the illimitable forest from the west. All the busy little persons of the woods began to chirp and twitter in vast excitement. There was the flutter of little wings in the underbrush; and there was a noisy chatter in the branches of the big pines, changing to crooning, sweeter calls at dusk. Once more, of a Sunday afternoon, Pattie Batch had the baby—gray-eyed, dimpled little Pattie Batch—once more dear little Pattie Batch had the baby at the companionable patch of wildflowers on the edge of the woods. A toddler, now—that adorable Little One! And quite able, too, if you will believe it, to utter, with perfect distinctness, the sweetest word in all the world. An accomplishment, indeed, hard to be matched in babies—of *that* tender age! It was a gentle day: a blue sky, with ships of white cloud sailing past, high above the forest, bound heaven knew where! but to some joyous event, and hurrying thereto. A soft, redolent breeze flowed into the clearing, where it paused to play with the flowers and sweet grasses; and then off it whisked, in shadow and sunshine, to that self-same joyous, distant place to which the great white clouds were going. It was a day for dreaming—such was the day: the sunshine of it, the tender wind, the new, sweet green, the amorous twitter. And little Pattie Batch was dreaming; she plucked flowers for the baby—she gave him a garland, she crowned him, she put a sceptre in his dimpled hand—and she was dreaming all the while. Sadly? Not at all! The mist in her gray eyes—which presently gathered and fell in two little tears—had no part with melancholy. Not at all! Not a bit of it! Pattie Batch was very, very happy. She would have admitted it had you asked her.

John Fairmeadow struck in from the Bottle River Trail and came smiling broadly to the patch of wild-flowers on the edge of the woods.

"Hello, there, Pattie Batch!" he shouted.

"'Lo, Jack!"

"Where's my tea?" John Fairmeadow demanded, scowling tremendously.

Pattie Batch pursed her lips.

"Eh?"

"It isn't ready."

"Not ready!" John Fairmeadow complained, with a great air of indignation. "Well, well! I like your independence!"

"When it is *time* for your tea, John Fairmeadow," said little Pattie Batch, in firm reproof, "you will *get* your tea—and not a minute before."

"Wh-wh-*what!*" John Fairmeadow stammered.

Pattie Batch smiled. It was delicious, indeed, to treat big John Fairmeadow in this masterful way. The chagrin and astonishment which he was quick to feign were really quite irresistible. Pattie Batch smiled: she couldn't help it; and then she giggled, and then she chuckled, and then she broke into a ripple of laughter. John Fairmeadow laughed, too—a great roar of laughter. And the baby, of course, displaying an amazing perception of the joke, chuckled like a cherub: than which, as everybody knows, there is no sweeter chuckle in the heavens above or on the earth beneath. What with John Fairmeadow's resonant, deep bass roar, and the baby's heavenly cachination, and Pattie Batch's rippling, tintinnabulous cadenza, you may be sure that a fine chord of glee was struck on that mellow Sunday afternoon in Gray Billy Batch's clearing on the Bottle River trail beyond Swamp's End.

Presently the afternoon was spent: the shadows were grown long in the clearing, the twitter in the woods had begun to fail, the west was flushing.

"Pattie!" said John Fairmeadow.

Pattie Batch started: the ardent quality of John Fairmeadow's voice was such that —

"Patience!" Fairmeadow repeated.

One glance was sufficient for Pattie Batch: one glance into John Fairmeadow's eyes was enough to startle the little thing quite out of her wits.

"It'th time for tea," said she, hastily, her lisp overcoming her.

"Not yet."

"Yeth, yeth!"

"Not yet," Fairmeadow repeated; "not until I ——"

"Yeth, yeth!" Pattie gasped.

Big John Fairmeadow had a sense of helplessness to which he was not at all used; and still continuing in this strange paralysis, he watched and listened, without lifting a finger to help himself, while Pattie Batch snatched the baby from his bed of flowers, protesting all the time that it was time for tea, that it was long past time for tea, indeed, that there wouldn't be any tea at all, if she didn't look out—watched and listened, confounded, while Pattie Batch fluttered off to the cabin, calling back that she would call John Fairmeadow when tea was ready, and that he mustn't come a minute before.

Here's a pretty pass for a tale to come to which should have a happy ending! John Fairmeadow brooding in the failing light at the edge of the woods: John Fairmeadow downcast and self-accusing. "Poor little thing!" thinks he; "she's frightened—a mere hint of the thing has frightened her!" John Fairmeadow, pacing the patch of wild-flowers, in grave trouble, called himself hard names. Had he not frightened and distressed the little soul that he loved so much? Why shouldn't he call himself hard names? And what right had John Fairmeadow, sometime Bowery drunkard and outcast, to lift his eyes to this sweet-blooming flower o' the woods? Regeneration was all very well in its way; but regeneration and new service could not wash a man's past away so that no stain remained upon his honour. John Fairmeadow had asked his God all about it, of course, being a man of that sort, and his God had seemed to approve; but Fairmeadow was convinced, now that Pattie Batch had fled, that he had mistaken the quiet voice in his own heart—and Fairmeadow was ashamed of himself. He would say no more: he would teach Pattie Batch to forget that he had said anything at all; and in this resolve he waited, downcast, brooding and ashamed, for Pattie's call from the cabin. And as for little Pattie, in the meantime, she was having much ado to get tea at all: for the mist in her gray eyes blinded her, and her hands would never do the thing she told them to, and she could find nothing at all in its place, and the tears just *would* fall on the toast, and everything, positively everything, was at sixes and sevens in her heart no less than in her kitchen.

Pattie Batch, you see, who had long ago observed the crisis approaching, had resolved and determined *not* to spoil John Fairmeadow's life —not even if the baby *never* had a father.

"No, by ginger!" thinks she. "I won't!"

Nothing but the dusk and starlight of spring could solve such a tangle as this. A deuce of a job, too, of course!

Dusk and starlight came together—dusk and starlight of spring at the edge of the woods. This was long after tea—long after John Fairmeadow, in the merriest fashion in the world, had partaken of toast and tears. Long after the baby had been put to bed, too: at a time, indeed, when the mystical powers of dusk and starlight had waxed large and mischievous. John Fairmeadow and Pattie Batch sat on Gray Billy Batch's porch together. The still, sweet dusk had fallen. They looked out over the little clearing—to the black pines and to the high starlit sky. Presently John Fairmeadow began to tell Pattie Batch of those other days—days terrible in memory. And Pattie Batch came closer—closer yet—as the tale of many sorrows was unfolded. Her motherly little heart ached: it was in her heart, perhaps, but to give comfort; but however that may be—and I am not informed—she was presently drawn comfortingly close to John Fairmeadow without knowing it at all. She sighed, sometimes; she sobbed a little, too: and always, while the tale went on, she gave a loving sympathy to the teller. John Fairmeadow was unaware: only the dusk and the starlight knew—and the little stars winked happily at the sight of it all. Nothing was held back by John Fairmeadow: no bitterness of degradation—no depth of sin—was concealed. And at the end of the wretched recital—so had dusk and starlight and love worked upon them both—little Pattie Batch was snuggled close to John Fairmeadow—was held close, too, so that John Fairmeadow had no difficulty whatsoever in softly kissing her upturned, tear-stained face.

"I love you, dear," said he.

"I'm glad," she whispered. "Oh, I'm so glad!"

They looked away to the pines and stars. Beyond—far beyond—Fairmeadow saw himself walking upright and at work in a world of men, but not now going the path alone; and it may be that Pattie Batch, too, visioned, in the far sky, the glory of her future.

"You and I, dear!" said Fairmeadow.

"You and I, Jack!"

"Always, dear?"

"Always."

They sat in this way for a long, long time, both dreaming, both with eyes lifted to the stars, each with a heart of joy; but presently little Pattie Batch jumped up, as though bethinking herself of a forgotten duty.

"Jack," she gasped, "I forgot to tell the baby."

Roused from sound sleep, the baby wailed dolorously. It was a stout complaint.

"Well?" Fairmeadow asked, when Pattie Batch got back.

"He's glad, too," replied little Pattie Batch.

Well, well, well! all said and done, the thing being told, at last, they go along very well at Swamp's End—love and labour. As love and labour will, unfailingly, being genuinely joined together. There is no doubting it at all: they are placid companions of the soul—givers of hope and wise counsellors. They are true: they do not fail. They go along very well, indeed, at Swamp's End; but there is no Mister Pattie Batch at Swamp's End, notwithstanding all that occurred in the dusk at Gray Billy Batch's lazy clearing on the edge of the big woods. There is no Mister Pattie Batch, believe me: there is nothing but a Mrs. John Fairmeadow. A rosy, dimpled, twinkling-eyed, shy, appealing, adorable little woman, of astonishing capacity: but only a little Mrs. John, after all—which, indeed, if the truth were known, she had rather be than anything else in all the wide world. There is John Fairmeadow at Swamp's End, as well as Mrs. John Fairmeadow: big, beloved John Fairmeadow, who still scolds and beseeches, and marries and buries, the boys, and who still right lustily wields his broom of righteousness in those woods—big John Fairmeadow: in the measure of his service and in the stature of his soul a Man. There is the little partner, too—lying at ease in the green field near by town: still tenderly loved, you may be sure, and still inspiring. And there is the baby. Of course—there is the baby! There is the Adorable One, satisfactorily fathered, at last: still with an unconquered and inexplicable predilection for lumber-jacks, as when on the Christmas Eve of his advent at Swamp's End, Billy the Beast poked a finger at his stout abdomen and excited nothing but a loud peal of laughter.

And there's something more than that at Swamp's End. There are —

Two babies!

THE END

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